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Thomas F Torrance

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THE

WORKS

OF

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D.

SOMETIME MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT PAISLEY, AND LATE PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE, IN NEW JERSEY.

CONTAINING

ESSAYS, SERMONS, &c.

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

INTENDED TO ILLUSTRATE AND ESTABLISH THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION BY GRACE, AND TO POINT OUT ITS INFLUENCE ON HOLINESS OF LIFE.

TOGETHER WITH HIS

LECTURES ON MORAL PHILOSOPHY, ELOQUENCE, AND DIVINITY;

HIS SPEECHES IN THE AMERICAN CONGRESS;

AND MANY OTHER VALUABLE PIECES NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED IN THIS COUNTRY.

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SERMONS

ON

INTERESTING SUBJECTS;

MOST OF THEM DELIVERED ON

PUBLIC OCCASIONS.

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ON

INTERESTING SUBJECTS.

SERMON I.

MAN IN HIS NATURAL STATE.

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

IN order to preach the gospel with success, it is necessary that we should begin, by establishing the great and fundamental truths, on which all the rest are built, and to which they constantly refer. Nay, it is necessary that we should often look back to these, and see that we be not off the foundation, or that it be not weakly or imperfectly laid. Of this sort, I take the guilt, misery, and weakness, of our

nature to be; and therefore have chosen the words now read, as the subject of discourse, in which the Spirit of God reproves the self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness of the church of Laodicea.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, &c. I suppose you will all easily understand, that the words are figurative, and are spoken entirely with a view to the spiritual state of that church. In this light, let us consider what is precisely their meaning.

We may either suppose, that this charge is brought against the church of Laodicea, because there were many there, under the profession of the gospel, who were, notwithstanding, still in a natural and unrenewed state—strangers to the power of religion, of which their being thus unhumbled, and insensible of their guilt and misery, was the evidence; and for which the remedy is prescribed in the following words: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."

Or we may suppose, that this reproof was in a great measure applicable to them all, in general, believers and unbelievers; the best of them being exceedingly prone to trust in themselves that they were righteous; instead of that humble dependence on the merit and grace of their Redeemer, which ought not only to be the refuge of the sinner, but the confidence of the saint. And there is no question that this is a proper caution to professing

Chriſtians in every age, to beware of ſplitting on the rock of ſelf-ſufficiency.

But as this diſpoſition reigns in the heart of every one that is yet at a diſtance from God—is the foundation of their ſecurity and impenitence—and is what they muſt be brought off from, before they can be reconciled to God; it is for their benefit that I chiefly deſign this diſcourſe, though it may alſo be uſeful, and ſhall be in part, applied to the children of God. It is an affecting thought, when purſued to its conſequences; yet, alas! it is unqueſtionably true, that in every aſſembly, ſuch as this, of profeſſing Chriſtians, there are not a few, who are in "the gall of bitterneſs, and in the bond of iniquity," under the wrath of God, and liable to the condemning ſentence of his law; and at the ſame time, that the far greateſt part of them are ignorant of it, and know not that they are *wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

In diſcourſing farther upon this ſubject, therefore, I ſhall,

I. Endeavour to prove and illuſtrate this truth, That all mankind are by nature in a ſtate of ſin and miſery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God.

II. I ſhall briefly ſhew you, that being brought to a lively ſenſe, and genuine conviction of this, is the firſt, and a neceſſary ſtep, to the ſaving knowledge of God, in Chriſt.—And in the *laſt* place, ſhall make ſome practical improvement of the ſubject.

I. In the *first* place, then, I am to prove and illuſtrate this truth, That all mankind are by nature in a ſtate of ſin and miſery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God. What is ſaid in this paſſage of the Laodiceans, is univerſally true of the poſterity of Adam. Unleſs an inward and eſſential change has been wrought upon them by the grace of God, they are *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* It is alſo true of them, as well as of the Laodiceans, that they know it not; but vainly preſume themſelves to be rich, and increaſed with goods, and to have need of nothing. If theſe two things are jointly true of many of you my hearers, there is nothing in which you can have ſo great a concern: therefore, let me earneſtly beſeech your moſt ſerious attention to what ſhall be ſaid; as the ſucceſs of this conviction is neceſſary to your underſtanding or profiting by any other part of divine truth, as I ſhall afterwards ſhew you.

The proof of the truth here aſſerted, can be only of two kinds. 1. From ſcripture, which is the teſtimony of God declaring it. 2. From the viſible ſtate of the world, and our own experience finding it to be ſo.

1. That all mankind are by nature in a ſtate of ſin and miſery, appears from the expreſs and repeated teſtimony of the word of God. And this teſtimony we have, not only in particular paſſages, carrying the truth, but in the ſtrain and ſpirit of the whole, and the ſeveral diſpenſations of divine providence there recorded, which are all

of them built upon this ſuppoſition, and intended to remedy this univerſal evil.

See what God declares, Gen. vi. 5. "And God ſaw that the wickedneſs of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And again, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." We may take the pſalmiſt David's teſtimony of himſelf, as a ſample of the reſt of mankind; and indeed he plainly intimates, that it is a common calamity. "Who can underſtand his errors? Cleanſe thou me from ſecret faults. Behold, I was ſhapen in iniquity, and in ſin did my mother conceive me."

We may take alſo the teſtimony of the apoſtle Paul, in his epiſtle to the Romans, which is the more full to our preſent purpoſe, that as he had never been at Rome, he is there laying the foundation of religion in general, and the Chriſtian diſpenſation in particular, by a clear and explicit proof of the need the world had of a Saviour, from its univerſal corruption and depravity. See, then, what he ſays: "What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wiſe, for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under ſin. As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one." And again, "Now we know, that what things ſoever the law ſaith, it ſaith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be ſtopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. For all have ſinned, and come ſhort of the glory of God."

You may alſo ſee that the apoſtle traces this diſorder to its very ſource: "Wherefore as by one man ſin entered into the world, and death by ſin: and ſo death paſſed upon all men, for that all have ſinned."

I ſhall add but one expreſs ſcripture-teſtimony more: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins."

But beſides the particular paſſages of ſcripture, poſitively declaring this truth, the whole frame and contexture of the ſcriptures, and all the diſpenſations of divine providence recorded in them, are a proof of the ſame thing. Man is every where conſidered as in a fallen and ſinful ſtate. Every thing that is preſcribed to him, and every thing that is done for him, goes upon that ſuppoſition. It is not one man, or a few men, that are in ſcripture called to repentance, but all without exception. Now, repentance is only the duty of a ſinner. An innocent perſon cannot repent; he has nothing to grieve for in his heart, or to forſake in his life. It is alſo proper to obſerve, that one of the ſcripture-characters of God is, "merciful and gracious, ſlow to anger, forgiving iniquity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin." Now, he could not be to us a forgiving God, and there would be no need that he ſhould be revealed under that character, unleſs we were ſinners that ſtood in need of pardon. Mercy, indeed, is the diſtinguiſhing attribute of God, and this can only have reſpect to offenders. All the other perfections of God might be exerciſed towards pure and holy creatures; but mercy only towards ſinners. He might be a good, holy, juſt, wiſe, powerful God, to perſons in a

ſtate of innocence; but he can ſhew mercy only to the guilty.

Do not the diſpenſations of God's providence ſhew the ſame thing? He ſent the flood, as a teſtimony of the wickedneſs of the world, and for the puniſhment of a guilty race. Remember alſo the ſacrifices, which were appointed, and accepted by God, from the beginning of the world. Sacrifices are for atonement and expiation. They are plainly a ſubſtitution in the room of a forfeited life. It is doing violence to common ſenſe to make them any thing elſe. The whole Jewiſh œconomy, which had in it ſo many ſacrifices, ſo many offerings, ſo many waſhings, and purifications, does plainly ſuppoſe the perſon uſing them to be infected with ſin, or moral pollution. Had not this been the caſe, they had been extremely abſurd and improper.

But the ſtrongeſt teſtimony of all that God hath given to the guilt and corruption of mankind, is his ſending his own Son into the world to redeem them, by the ſacrifice of himſelf. To what purpoſe redeem them, if they were not in bondage? Why ſo coſtly an expiation, if our lives had not been forfeited to divine juſtice? But that it was for this purpoſe that Chriſt came into the world, is ſo plain, from the whole of the ſcriptures, that I ſhall ſelect but one paſſage out of many, to prove it: "Whom God hath ſet forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteouſneſs, for the remiſſion of ſins that are paſt, through the forbearance of God."

What is ſaid already on this head, is a full proof from ſcripture, that man is now, by nature, in a

ſtate of ſin; that he is alſo, in conſequence of that, in a ſtate of miſery, and liable to the wrath of God, is proved by many of the ſame paſſages, and by many others: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs, and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs. For the wages of ſin is death," &c. But I need not multiply paſſages to this purpoſe; for in all God's diſpenſations, the deſerved puniſhment of ſinners is as evident as their ſinfulneſs itſelf. It is indeed fully proved, from the eſſential perfections of God, particularly his holineſs and juſtice. He is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity. "Evil cannot dwell with him, nor fools," that is, ſinners, "ſtand in his ſight."

Is not all this then, my brethren, a ſufficient proof, from the teſtimony of God, that man, in a natural ſtate, is ſinful and miſerable? Shall we affirm ourſelves to be whole, if he ſaith we are unſound? Do we know more than God? Will we not give credit to the fountain of truth? Nor is it any objection to this, that we ourſelves know it not, or are but little ſenſible of it. One conſiderable part of the diſeaſe, is blindneſs of underſtanding: ſo that we may, and muſt till our eyes are opened, be ignorant of our danger. We may think and ſay, that we are rich, and increaſed in goods, and have need of nothing, while we are *wretched, and miſerable, and blind, and naked.*

2. The ſame thing appears from the viſible ſtate of the world, and our own experience. Unbelievers are apt to hear with indifference, and neglect what they are told from ſcripture-teſtimony, unleſs

otherwiſe confirmed to them; and it is with the unbeliever we have now to do. Beſides, the eſtabliſhment of this truth, upon other evidence than that of ſcripture, ought to have a powerful influence in inducing men to believe the other truths in ſcripture, that are connected with and founded upon it. I think it, therefore, highly proper to lay before you what evidence we have of our loſt ſtate, from the obſervation of the world, though the ſcriptures had been ſilent. I would likewiſe recommend to all, what ſhall be ſaid on this ſubject, to preſerve your faith unſhaken, and keep you from blaſphemous, unbelieving thoughts, if at any time you ſhould be tempted to them, ſince even unenlightened reaſon confirms the foundation of divine truth, and nature and providence conſpire in preaching the doctrine of divine grace.

Now, doth not our experience, as well as the obſervation of others, ſhew us that we are born in ſin, and conceived in iniquity? May we not ſay from our own knowledge, that the imaginations of the heart of man, are only evil from his youth, and that continually? is there not a proneneſs and tendency to evil, univerſally to be obſerved in mankind? and a backwardneſs and averſion to that which is good? Is not this apparent even in children, upon the firſt dawn of reaſon in their minds, and the firſt ſight of choice or inclination in their hearts? Surely it muſt be owned, that in that early period, they are at leaſt *comparatively* innocent. If any among us is without ſin, it muſt be the youngeſt; *yet folly is bound in the heart of a child.* How hard is it to guard them from evil, and to in-

ſpire them with good diſpoſitions, even by the wiſeſt and earlieſt care, in their inſtruction? and even after the moſt ſucceſsful pains, are there not ſtill many remaining blemiſhes, through the prevalence of corrupt nature, which ſhew, that the ground-work itſelf was faulty? But, on the contrary, how eaſily do men learn that which is evil? Do they need to be taught? Is it not enough to give them licence? How juſt is that deſcription in Jeremiah! "They are wiſe to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." I am far from denying, that men are improved and forwarded in ſin by inſtruction and example, as well as in that which is good: but it is plain, they are far apter ſcholars in the firſt than in the laſt; which plainly ſhews they are more powerfully diſpoſed to it by nature. Nay, is it not evident, from the univerſal experience and teſtimony of thoſe who act from a principle of religion, that it is extremely difficult, with all the care they can take, to reſiſt the propenſity of nature to the contrary? and that in the beſt it often gets the ſuperiority, when they are off their guard? Is not this an evidence of the depravity and corruption of human nature, and its tendency to evil? Are thoſe who hate ſin often overcome by it, and ſhall thoſe who love it preſume to ſay, they are free from it?

If any ſhould aſk, How I prove that that courſe of action to which human nature is inclined is evil, without the aſſiſtance of ſcripture? I anſwer, from reaſon; and that many ways: from its pernicious effects on ſocieties, and private perſons; from the teſtimony of the world in general, when others than

themſelves are concerned; and from the teſtimony of every man's conſcience in his own caſe. Who is there that does not often feel in himſelf a powerful tendency to what he cannot but in his heart condemn? Is not his conſcience God's vicegerent? and doth not natural religion, as well as the religion of Chriſt, declare him corrupt? So that I may ſay with the apoſtle Paul, not citing the paſſage as a proof, but as an illuſtration and deſcription of the character and ſtate of natural men, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; theſe having not the law, are a law unto themſelves, which ſhew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conſcience alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts, the mean while, accuſing or elſe excuſing one another."

Thus there is as much light remaining with us ſince the fall, as to ſhew, that we are out of the way, but not to bring us back to it again.

As a ſerious conſideration of the ſtate of the wicked may ſhew us our natural impurity, ſo it hath been long ago diſcovered, and confeſſed by many of the ancient heathens, who never heard of the name of Chriſt, nor knew of the remedy. Theſe, diſcerning by nature the perfectly pure and holy nature of God, and comparing it with the diſpoſitions prevalent in man, could not reconcile them together; but concluded, that a creature ſo corrupt could not come in that condition out of the hands of its Creator. This difficulty ſome of them endeavoured to ſolve by a ſtate of pre-exiſtence; which bears ſome reſemblance to the true

ſolution given of it in the holy ſcripture, viz. the apoſtacy of our firſt parents; which entailed a corrupted nature upon their poſterity, in which the light of nature and revealed truth ſeem almoſt wholly to coincide.

It is to the ſame thing that I cannot help attributing the practice, that ſo univerſally prevailed over the heathen world before the coming of Chriſt, *of offering ſacrifices*, to appeaſe the wrath of the Deity, ſuppoſed to be offended. That the cuſtom of ſacrificing prevailed very generally, perhaps univerſally among the heathen nations, at the greateſt diſtance from, and having no correſpondence with each other, is a certain and unqueſtionable fact. Neither do I ſee to what cauſe we can aſcribe it, unleſs to one of theſe two; either an ancient tradition from the beginning of the world, and ſpread with the inhabitants through the ſeveral parts of it, as they ſeparated and peopled it; or to the common condition of human nature, which dictated the ſame thing to perſons in ſuch diſtant places.

If the firſt of theſe ſuppoſitions is embraced, which indeed I ſuppoſe to be the truth, it appears that ſacrifices were appointed by God to man in his fallen ſtate, for the pardon of ſin, and that they had reference to the great propitiatory ſacrifice of Chriſt upon the croſs.

If we prefer the laſt ſuppoſition, it would ſeem as if the conſciouſneſs of guilt had uniformly prompted men in all ages and nations to offer up ſome atonement for their offences. In both caſes, it equally ſerves to prove the corruption and ſinfulneſs of human nature.

Now, as what hath been ſaid plainly proves the impurity of man in his natural ſtate, ſo his miſery and liableneſs to puniſhment may alſo be proved, both as a natural conſequence of his ſinfulneſs, and even more plainly by itſelf. There is not only a conſiderable degree of actual miſery in the world, but plain preſages of more to follow it in the world to come. Need I take up much time, in enumerating the ſeveral miſeries and calamities incident to human life? Are not oppreſſion and injury from one another, poverty, ſickneſs, pain and death, the plain fruits of ſin, and viſible tokens of God's diſpleaſure? Man, with ſome marks of ſuperiority and excellence of nature, is even, by means of his ſuperiority, his knowledge, and foreſight of his own ſufferings, more miſerable, than any other of the creatures, that is equally ſubject to the ſtroke of death.

To the whole I ſhall only ſubjoin one conſideration more, which is applicable to both parts of the argument.—I have often thought, that the natural terror and fear, with which men are poſſeſſed of the preſence of God, or any remarkable token of his power, is nothing elſe but an indication of guilt, or an apprehenſion of wrath.

You may ſee ſome incidents in ſcripture, from which it is natural to conclude, that when God makes any viſible manifeſtation of his glory, or ſends any of his angels or miniſters from heaven to earth, thoſe who are preſent are filled with the utmoſt dread and terror.

Thus, in the relation given of God's appearance upon mount Sinai, it is ſaid, "And ſo terrible was

the ſight, that Moſes ſaid, I exceedingly fear and quake." See another example, in Iſaiah: "Then ſaid I, Woe is me, for I am undone, becauſe I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have ſeen the King, the Lord of hoſts." And in the New Teſtament, in the apoſtle John, "And when I ſaw him, I fell at his feet as dead."

And is not this always the caſe, in all ages, that upon any remarkable appearance of an inhabitant of the other world, or even when any ſuch thing is falſely apprehended, the inhabitants of this world are filled with extraordinary terror? What is this, do you imagine, but conſciouſneſs of guilt, and apprehenſion of vengeance?

Innocence has no enemy, and it has nothing to fear. We are all in much the ſame caſe with Adam, immediately after his firſt tranſgreſſion; when he heard God's voice in the garden, he was afraid, and fled, and hid himſelf. We read of no ſuch fear poſſeſſing him, while he retained his innocence; but as ſoon as he had ſinned, he began to dread an avenging God.

From all this, then, I would conclude, that reaſon accords with ſcripture in ſaying, that "all have ſinned and come ſhort of the glory of God:" that man, in a natural ſtate, is "wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

SERMON II.

AN INDUCEMENT TO COME TO CHRIST.

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

HAVING, in a former discourse, proved and illustrated this truth, That all mankind are by nature in a state of sin and misery, under the bondage of corruption, and liable to the wrath of God, —I proceed now to the *second* thing proposed, which was, to shew you, that being brought to a lively sense and genuine conviction of this, is the first, and a necessary step to the saving knowledge of God in Christ.

On this I shall not need to spend much time, as it is so exceedingly plain, both in itself and from what hath been already said. It is, however, necessary to set it clearly before you, in order to lay a foundation for the improvement of the subject.

If the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified,

proceeds upon the ſuppoſition of our ſinful and miſerable condition by nature; then, ſurely, it can neither be valued, embraced, nor improved, and indeed I think hardly underſtood, by thoſe who know not this their natural ſtate. What Chriſt hath done, and promiſes to do in our behalf, is deſigned as a remedy for our diſtreſſed condition; and therefore, till the diſtreſs is known, the remedy will be ſet at nought. If a phyſician ſhould offer his care and ſkill for the recovery of a man, who eſteemed himſelf in perfect health, would he not deride the propoſal, ſo long as he continued in that opinion? If any man ſhould offer a charitable ſupply of clothes and food, to one who imagined himſelf immenſely rich, and gloried in his riches, would he not look upon it as the groſſeſt inſult?

Juſt ſo is the goſpel treated by all ſuch as ſee not their miſery. What is the ſubſtance of the goſpel? 'To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the ſons of men. Behold, I preach to you Chriſt crucified, a Saviour ſuited to your neceſſities, able to ſave to the uttermoſt all that come to God through him. He is well fitted to be a Mediator between you and your offended Maker. He hath offered himſelf up, a ſacrifice to the juſtice of God for your ſins, by the merit of which you may be ſaved from deſerved and impending ruin. He offers himſelf as a guide, to direct your feet in the way of peace; to ſtand by you in the difficulties and dangers to which you are expoſed, and to give you, by his communicated ſtrength, a complete victory over all your enemies.'

What reply doth the unconvinced ſinner make to all this? Why, he ſaith, 'I know nothing of this miſery you ſuppoſe, wherefore then a Saviour? I ſee no ſin, what neceſſity, then, for an atonement? I fear no wrath, therefore will ſeek for no interceſſor. My eyes are open, therefore I will have no guide. I know of no enemies, and therefore will not enter into contention with a ſhadow, or flee when no man purſueth.'

Theſe, my brethren, are, either directly or implicitly, the thoughts of men in a ſecure and unconvinced ſtate; and while they are ſo, they can ſee no form nor comelineſs in the Saviour, nor any beauty, that they ſhould deſire him.

It is otherwiſe with the broken in ſpirit. He ſees his own vileneſs and unworthineſs, and therefore cannot lift his eyes to God, but through the atoning blood of Chriſt. He fears the *avenger of blood*, and therefore flees to the *city of refuge*. The meſſage of the goſpel is to him indeed glad tidings of great joy, and he counts it a faithful ſaying, and *worthy of all acceptation*.

The juſtice of this repreſentation you may ſee from what our Saviour himſelf ſays of the end of his coming: "They that be whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick: But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not ſacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance."

See alſo the terms of his invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt."

Appetite, and knowledge of neceſſity, is firſt

required, or ſuppoſed, to the beſtowing of goſpel-bleſſings: "Ho! every one that thirſteth, come ye to the waters."

I ſhall only add, that we find, by the inſtances recorded in ſcripture of ſuch as were converted by the preaching of the goſpel, that their converſion took its riſe from conviction of ſin: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and ſaid unto Peter, and to the reſt of the apoſtles, Men and brethren, what ſhall we do?" See alſo the inſtance of the jailor: "Then he called for a light, and ſprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas: And brought them out, and ſaid, Sirs, what muſt I do to be ſaved?"

Repentance unto life, and the return of the ſinner to God, proceeds from the ſame cauſe, in every age. Who are the perſons who believingly apply to Chriſt for the pardon of their ſins, but thoſe who ſee they are undone without him? Who are the perſons in whoſe eyes he is moſt precious, and who maintain the moſt habitual dependence upon him? Are they not thoſe who have been moſt effectually humbled, and ſee their own inſufficiency for any thing that is good?

From all this I conclude, that none can come to Chriſt by faith, but thoſe who ſee themſelves to be *wretched, and miſerable, and blind, and naked.*

LET us now make ſome improvement of what hath been ſaid upon this ſubject, for your inſtruction and direction.

1. I would improve what has been ſaid on this ſubject, for diſcovering the danger of many among

us, who have never yet been brought to a juſt ſenſe of their character and ſtate. Even the general belief that ſuch often have in the ſcriptures, may ſhew them what they have to fear. I might, no doubt, firſt of all obſerve, how very guilty and miſerable thoſe are, who are moſt notorious for ſins of the groſſeſt and moſt ſhameful kind. But my ſubject leads me more directly to conſider, who are, in general, *unrenewed*, than to mark the ſeveral degrees of guilt in particular ſinners. From the text, therefore, and the illuſtration of it, I am authoriſed to declare to you, and *I beseech you to hear it with application*, That all ſuch as were never brought to a real diſcovery and inward ſenſe of their miſerable condition by nature, are ſtill in a ſtate of wrath, and ſtrangers to the power of religion, whatever may be their profeſſion, and whatever may be their preſent peace. O! how eaſy is it to lay aſleep a natural conſcience, and to keep a deceitful corrupt heart in a ſtate of eaſe and ſecurity? Some formality in outward duty, ſome moderation in ſin, ſo to ſpeak, the natural decay and weakneſs of human paſſions, or youthful luſts, in a character formed by human prudence, and regulated by health, credit, or gain, is often made to ſupply the place of a heart renewed by the Spirit and grace of God. But conſider, I beſeech you, that though ſome may be tenfold more the children of the devil than others, yet all by nature are the ſervants of ſin; and "except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God." It is not only ſuch as are profane or unclean, ſuch as riot in brutiſh ſenſuality, ſuch as

are the plagues of human ſociety, who live in brawls and contention, but all in whom an eſſential change has never been wrought, that are thus *concluded* under condemnation.

It is uſual for men to take encouragement from ſeeing others worſe than themſelves, and to conſider all the threatenings in ſcripture as levelled againſt the chief and capital offenders; but my text is chiefly directed to ſuch as ſay they are "rich, and increaſed with goods." Can you ſay, then, my brethren, that you have been brought under genuine convictions of ſin? Have you been obliged to fall down proſtrate before God, when ſitting upon the throne of his holineſs? Have you found the ſentence of death in yourſelves, and diſcovered no remedy but in Chriſt? If this has never been your caſe, you have reaſon to fear, that you are yet "in the gall of bitterneſs, and in the bond of iniquity."

But I muſt tell you alſo, that this is matter of feeling more than of profeſſion. It is not enough to ſpeak honourably of Chriſt, or of his works. Many do ſo, who never felt their neceſſity, or ſeriouſly and in good earneſt applied to him. It were a happy thing, if all among our hearers, who call for evangelical preaching, who quarrel with us when they think we do not preach the Saviour's croſs, the loſt ſtate of man, and the doctrine of free grace, were experimentally acquainted with theſe truths. Many ſuch have only been accuſtomed to hear the Redeemer ſpoken of with reverence. They may be able to imitate the language of ſome

of his ſervants, though they know very little of that brokenneſs of ſpirit which accompanies true repentance.

But leſt this ſhould be in any meaſure miſtaken, I muſt make theſe two obſervations: the *firſt* is, that a lively ſenſe and deep conviction of ſin is, properly ſpeaking, but a negative mark of true religion; giving us to know, that the unhumbled are yet impenitent. For it is certain, that many have been under very ſtrong convictions, nay, have been driven to the very borders of deſpair with terror, who yet never were effectually changed, but ſtifled their convictions, and returned to their former ſecurity of heart, and careleſſneſs of life.

Secondly, There may be ſome, on the other hand, who are truly *born of God*, in whom the terrors of conviction have not been very remarkable. This happens moſt frequently in the caſe of thoſe who are called in their infancy, or early years, and who have had the advantage of a careful and pious education. It would be deſtructive of the comforts of God's children to lay down one method, in which he always proceeds. He is free and ſovereign in the manner of his dealing with ſinners; and ſoftens ſome hearts by kindneſs, as well as others by correction. So that if the end be brought about, we need be leſs ſolicitous about the ſteps of his procedure. Yet I think humility of ſpirit is inſeparable from real religion; and if it be leſs viſible in the anguiſh of repentance, it will be ſtill manifeſt in the temper of the penitent.

2. Let me now, for the improvement of this

ſubject, lay down a few of the beſt and moſt ſolid evidences of genuine conviction of ſin. And,

(1.) It is a good ſign that conviction is genuine, when there is a clear and deep apprehenſion of the *evil* of ſin, as well as the *danger* of it; when the mind dwells not only on the atrocity of particular crimes, but on the aggravation of all ſin as ſuch; when the ſinner is truly offended with himſelf, for departing from his Maker's ſervice, breaking his holy laws, forgetting or deſpiſing his innumerable mercies. There may be, and there is often, an apprehenſion of ſuffering when there is little ſenſe of the evil of ſin: but the conviction is then genuine, when it makes the ſinner not only remember what he has done, but confeſs what he has deſerved.

(2.) It is a good evidence, when the ſenſe of the evil of ſin abides and grows, even though the fear of wrath may in a great meaſure have abated.

It is obſervable, that conviction of ſin uſually takes its riſe from ſome groſs or heinous acts, which firſt alarm the conſcience, and in ſuch a ſituation the attention of the penitent is fixed on nothing elſe but the enormities of his life. If this view continues, and produces its effects, he is ſoon brought to ſee and confeſs the inherent vanity of his heart, the worldlineſs of his affections, and the unprofitableneſs of his converſation. It is a very common thing, for perſons who ſeem to have ſome ſenſe of the commiſſion of crimes, to have little or no ſenſe at all of the neglect of duty, and of living daily to themſelves. It was a heavy charge, however, brought by the prophet againſt Belſhazzar: "And

the God in whoſe hand thy breath is, and whoſe are all thy ways, haſt thou not glorified." Wherever there is true repentance, though there may be the greateſt peace of mind, there will be alſo a deep and growing ſenſe of the evil of ſin, and the obligation of being habitually devoted to God.

(3.) It is a good evidence, when there is a continued and growing eſteem of the neceſſity and value of the mediation of Chriſt. It was to ſave ſinners that he came. A ſenſe of ſin is neceſſary to our receiving him; and in proportion to its ſtrength will certainly be our attachment to him. This, indeed, is the great and vital principle of the ſpiritual life: "I am crucified with Chriſt; nevertheleſs I live; yet not I, but Chriſt liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the fleſh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himſelf to die for me."

(4.) The beſt and ſureſt mark of real conviction of ſin, is, if it leaves you poſſeſſed of a deep hatred and abhorrence of it, and a daily ſolicitude to fly from it. Some may counterfeit a ſenſe of the evil of ſin to their own hearts; may have a real fear of its bitter conſequences, and even a preſumptuous reliance on Chriſt for pardon; and yet may, in ſome inſtances, adhere to the practice of it.

Floods of tears from ſuch a perſon avail nothing: but he hath certainly truly ſorrowed for ſin, who in his practice forſakes it; that is to ſay, he is not willingly ſubject to any known ſin; but ſays with Elihu, "That which I ſee not, teach thou me: If I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

3. Let me beſeech all ſerious perſons, to improve this ſubject for the trial of their ſtate. Examine, by the principles above laid down, the reality and the progreſs of religion in your ſouls. Have you a growing ſenſe of the evil of ſin, and of your own unworthineſs? This is at once an evidence, and a mean of growth in grace. He that thinks leaſt of himſelf is higheſt in God's account; and the more a believer increaſes in holineſs and real worth, the more he increaſes in humility. As it is an evidence, it is alſo a mean of further improvement; for he that hath the deepeſt ſenſe of his unworthineſs and weakneſs, will certainly live moſt by faith on the merit and grace of his Redeemer.

Therefore, Chriſtians, try yourſelves by this important ſign. Whether do you, by religious duties, build yourſelves up on ſelf-righteouſneſs, or do you only learn by them, how far you fall ſhort of what is incumbent on you? What innumerable evils compaſs you about! and therefore how much you have need of mercy inſtead of reward! Do you look upon the works of righteouſneſs which you have done, as ſomething by which you merit at the hand of God? or do you look upon them as the evidence of his own work in you, and for you, and give him the glory to whom it is due?

4. I ſhall now conclude the whole, with a few directions for producing and preſerving this profitable ſenſe and conviction of ſin. And,

(1.) Let me beg of every hearer, the ſerious conſideration of himſelf and his ways. Many have

no ſenſe of their ſinfulneſs, becauſe they have no knowledge of themſelves at all; but go through the world in uninterrupted thoughtleſſneſs and unconcern. Is there any thing of greater moment than the ſtate of your minds, and your hope towards God? Inattention is perhaps a more univerſal cauſe of impiety, than high-handed and obſtinate profanity. Would you but ſeriouſly conſider your ways, and lay to heart the things that belong to your peace, I would count it a hopeful circumſtance, and expect you would ſpeedily ſee your danger, and God in his mercy would lead you to the cure.

2. Give yourſelves much to reading, and hearing the word of God. The entrance of his word giveth light. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, and correction: but it is particularly neceſſary for *conviction;* for by the law is the knowledge of ſin. What wonder, if thoſe who never open a Bible, and ſeldom enter into the houſe of God, ſhould be ignorant of their guilt and miſery? The word of God ſhews his right in you, pleads his cauſe, and challenges your apoſtacy. It is exceedingly rare that thoſe who have fairly turned their backs upon God's inſtituted worſhip, are diſturbed in their ſecurity; but are ſuffered to ſleep on till they ſleep the ſleep of death. But it frequently happens, that thoſe who attend ordinances, even from no higher principle than curioſity, cuſtom, or form, find that the word of God is *a fire and hammer*, that breaketh the rock in pieces: "that it is quick and powerful, ſharper than any two-edged ſword, piercing, even to the dividing aſunder of

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ſoul and ſpirit, and joints and marrow, and is a diſcerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

3. In the *laſt* place, Let me beſeech you often to ſeat yourſelves in the immediate preſence of God, or rather, frequently to recollect, that you can no where go from his ſpirit, or fly from his preſence. There is, if I may ſpeak ſo, a light and glory in the preſence of God, that diſcerns and diſcloſes the works of darkneſs. We may often excuſe or palliate our conduct to men, and even hide its deformity from our own view, when we could not juſtify it to ourſelves, if we reflect, that "it is open and manifeſt in the ſight of God." If, therefore, there is any thing in your practice, which you are inclined to palliate, and apt to excuſe—ſuppoſe you were ſtanding at the judgement-ſeat of Chriſt, where all of us ſhall ſhortly be, and think, whether your excuſes will then ſtand the teſt of his impartial ſearch.

"If our hearts condemn us not, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." It is therefore the duty and intereſt of every ſinner, to take ſhame and confuſion of face to himſelf, and apply to the "blood of ſprinkling, which ſpeaketh better things than the blood of Abel."

SERMON III.

TRUST IN GOD.

ISAIAH, l. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

IT is said of every real believer, that he walks by faith, and not by sight. If this is true, it will follow, that his faith must be exposed to a variety of trials, while he continues in a world of sense. These trials arise from the state of his own mind, from his outward condition, from the state of the world with which he stands connected, and from the mutual influence of all these one upon another. From this situation it is easy to see, that there are few duties, for the exercise of which a good man will have greater or more frequent occasion than that of trust and reliance upon God. Trust is the duty and the refuge of the needy, of the dependant, of the weak, of the timorous, and the distressed. How many are included under one or more of these

characters! or rather, who is it that can say he is altogether excluded?

Agreeably to this, we need but open the sacred volume, to perceive how frequent the exhortations are to trust in God, and how many views are given us of his power, wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness, to encourage us to an unshaken reliance. At the same time, I am sorry to say, that there are few duties which are more imperfectly understood by many professing Christians. Even pious persons often sin both on the right hand and on the left, that is to say, both by diffidence and presumption. I have, therefore, laid hold of this opportunity, and made choice of this passage of scripture, in order to open and illustrate a little this important duty of a servant of God. How seasonable it is, you will easily perceive; for in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we have set before us Christ Jesus, the unspeakable gift of God, the great pledge of his love, and the great foundation of our reliance upon him, not only for his saving mercy in general, but for every necessary blessing in our way to eternal rest.

This passage of scripture is also well suited to the subject. It was spoken to the Jews in a lax and dissolute age, when many had turned their backs upon the service of God, had deserted his ordinances and despised his servants, which is always an occasion both of affliction and temptation to his own children. This appears from the first words of the chapter: "For thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? and which of my

creditors is it to whom I have ſold you? Behold, for your iniquities you have ſold yourſelves, and for your tranſgreſſions is your mother put away." As alſo from the 3d and 4th verſes: "I clothe the heavens with blackneſs, and I make ſackcloth their covering. The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I ſhould know how to ſpeak a word in ſeaſon to him that is weary."

In diſcourſing further on this ſubject, it is propoſed, through the aſſiſtance of divine grace,

I. To open a little the character and ſtate of thoſe who are called upon and exhorted to truſt in the name of the Lord.

II. To explain the duty of truſt, and point out the foundation of it.

III. To apply the ſubject for your inſtruction and comfort.

I. In the *firſt* place, then, I am to open a little the character and ſtate of thoſe who are here called upon and exhorted to truſt in the name of the Lord.

Their deſcription is as follows: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his ſervant; that walketh in darkneſs, and hath no light? let him truſt in the name of the Lord, and ſtay himſelf upon his God." It will help us to enter into the ſpirit and meaning of the prophet's words, if we keep in view the ſtate of the Jewiſh church, hinted at a little while ago. "Who is among you;" that is, if there is one or more, if there is a ſmall ſelect number in the midſt of gene-

ral corruption and depravity, who have kept their garments unpolluted, though iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold;—"that feareth the Lord?" You know it is common in ſcripture to deſcribe religion in general by ſome particular leading branch of it. The fear of God is often made uſe of for this purpoſe, as in that paſſage, "There ſhall be no want to them that *fear him*." It may, therefore, ſignify thoſe who have a ſincere and unfeigned regard to the commandments of God, and have choſen him as their portion and hope; thoſe who deſire and deſerve to be diſtinguiſhed from the profane deſpiſer, the ſecure formaliſt, or the diſguiſed hypocrite; thoſe, in a word, who are, and who deſire to appear, to uſe the ſtrong language of ſcripture, upon the Lord's ſide in every ſtruggle, and who reſolve, with Joſhua, that whatever others do, for their part they will ſerve the Lord.

But I cannot help thinking, we may alſo, with great ſafety, explain the words in a cloſer and ſtricter ſenſe, and ſuppoſe, that by fearing the Lord is to be underſtood a due reverence for his infinite majeſty, a humble veneration for his ſacred authority. This is a moſt excellent fence or guard to the conſcience in an evil time, and a noble preſervative from the ſpreading infection and inſinuating poiſon of prevailing or faſhionable ſins. It is alſo the uſual character of a diſſolute age, to have caſt off fear, to treat the moſt ſacred things with ſcorn, and to look upon that holy ſolicitude to avoid ſin, which appears in the carriage and language of a child of God, as a mark of meanneſs or weakneſs of mind. In ſuch an age, one who fears God is well deſcribed

by the prophet Iſaiah: "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite ſpirit, and trembleth at my word."

The next part of the character is, "and obeyeth the voice of his ſervant;" that is to ſay, is willing to hearken to the meſſage of God, by the mouth of his ſervants. The words of the text, no doubt, may be conſidered as primarily referring to the inſpired prophets, who bore an immediate commiſſion, miraculouſly atteſted, from God. Many, even of theſe, were ſet at nought, their meſſage derided, and their perſons inſulted, when they attempted to ſtem the tide of prevailing vice, or boldly denounced the divine vengeance againſt high-handed ſinners. But the ſincerely pious obeyed their voice. I ſhall make no ſcruple to apply this to ourſelves, and the preſent age. Our bleſſed Redeemer hath eſtabliſhed in his church a ſtanding miniſtry, and the regular adminiſtration of ordinances. And though we have this treaſure in earthen veſſels, yet in no other way doth he now communicate his will, and vouchſafe his preſence to his people, but by the reading and hearing of his word, and attendance upon his inſtituted worſhip. It will, no doubt, therefore, be a part of the character of a good man, that he will love the ordinances, and obey the voice of the ſervants of God; that he will conſider him who hath ſent them, and receive inſtruction, not as the word of man, but, as it is in deed and in truth, the word of God.

On the other hand, when iniquity prevails, when irreligion and profaneneſs lift up their heads, one of the moſt uſual concomitants, and one of the

ſureſt proofs of it, is a neglect of ordinances, and contempt of thoſe who are concerned in their adminiſtration: how far this is at preſent the caſe, I leave to yourſelves to judge. While I ſpeak this, my brethren, I do by no means deſire to ſee an ignorant people, diſtracted by the gloomy terrors of ſuperſtition, or led blindfold by the enchanted cord of implicit faith. But ſure I am, there is an extreme on either hand, and thoſe who truly fear the Lord, will honour the perſons, and obey the voice, of ſuch as plead his cauſe and ſpeak in his name. You may reſt aſſured, that though they neither deſerve nor claim any authority on their account, yet ſo long as they ſtand in the divine counſels, and ſpeak the divine word, their meſſage will be attended with this awful ſanction, "He that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me; and he that deſpiſeth me deſpiſeth him that ſent me."

The laſt part of the character here drawn, which lays the foundation for the ſubſequent direction, is, "that walketh in darkneſs and hath no light." Darkneſs and light, beſides their literal, have often a metaphorical ſenſe in ſcripture. They are, indeed, uſed with a good deal of latitude and variety. But I think their metaphorical ſignification may be reduced to theſe two general heads.

1. Sometimes light ſignifies knowledge, and darkneſs ſignifies ignorance; as in Eph. v. 8. "Ye were ſometimes darkneſs, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Acts, xxvi. 18. "To turn them from darkneſs unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Job, xxxvii. 19.

"Teach us what we ſhall ſay unto him, for we cannot order our ſpeech by reaſon of darkneſs."

2. Sometimes darkneſs ſignifies diſtreſs or trouble, and the correſpondent ſignification of light is deliverance and joy; as, 2 Sam. xxii. 28. 29. "And the afflicted people thou wilt ſave: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayeſt bring them down. For thou art my lamp, O Lord; and the Lord will lighten my darkneſs." Job, xix. 8. "He hath fenced up my way that I cannot paſs; he hath put darkneſs in my paths." Pſalm xcvii. 11. "Light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for the upright in heart." Eſther, viii. 16. "And the Jews had light, and gladneſs, and joy, and honour."

None of theſe ſenſes is to be excluded in the paſſage before us. Believers may walk in darkneſs, when ignorant or uncertain as to what nearly concerns them, as well as under diſtreſs and trouble. They have alſo a mutual influence upon, produce, and are produced by, one another. For illuſtrating this a little more particularly, obſerve, that a good man may walk in darkneſs, 1. When he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his intereſt in the divine favour. 2. When he is under the preſſure of outward calamity. 3. When the ſtate of the church is ſuch, that he cannot underſtand or explain, in a ſatisfying manner, the courſe of divine providence. Theſe particulars I have it not in view to enlarge much upon, but only to explain them ſo far as is neceſſary to lay a foundation for what ſhall be afterwards offered on the duty to truſt in God.

1. then, A good man may walk in darkneſs

when he is in doubt or uncertainty as to his intereſt in the divine favour. I apprehend that ſome meaſure of hope in God's mercy is eſſential to true piety, and not only the right, but the poſſeſſion of every child of God. Faith and deſpair are beyond all queſtion inconſiſtent. Faith and hope are inſeparable. Yet certainly the excellent ones of the earth may be ſometimes involved in great perplexity and doubt. This is plain from ſcripture-examples, from daily experience, and from the nature and reaſon of the thing. How violent a ſtruggle do we often find the pſalmiſt David in, between hope and fear! "O my God, my ſoul is caſt down in me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." How many do we ſee every day under a ſpirit of bondage, who, though they ſtill cleave to God as their portion, yet are often full of fears, and ſeldom dare confidently affirm their intereſt in, or relation to him. And indeed how can it be otherwiſe? While we are here, our ſanctification is but imperfect; and, alas! with regard to many, it is often hard to determine, whether we ſhould not write upon it, *Mene tekel*, as eſſentially defective.

Sin ſeparates between God and his people, and cauſes him to hide his face from them. Nay, ſometimes, though there be no particular or provoking crime, as the cauſe of his controverſy with them, he may withdraw from them the light of his countenance, to exerciſe their vigilance, or to try their patience. I know, my brethren, that the diſtreſs of ſerious ſouls, when mourning after an

abſent or an angry God, crying to him in ſecret, and following hard after him in his ordinances, is by many treated with the higheſt degree of contempt. But ſurely, if peace of mind, from a well-founded hope of the divine favour, is the greateſt of all preſent bleſſings; and if this, from the variableneſs of our own conduct, is ſometimes more, ſometimes leſs ſtrong, and ſometimes wholly ſuſpended: when this laſt is the caſe, it muſt occaſion inexpreſſible concern; and there can be no greater evidence of irreligion and impiety, than to call it in queſtion.

2. A good man may walk in darkneſs, when under the preſſure of outward calamity. This, in a real believer, is never wholly ſeparated from the former. Even in itſelf, indeed, no affliction for the preſent is joyous, but grievous. The diſorders of this feeble frame, poverty and ſtraitneſs of proviſion, unjuſt ſlander and reproach, muſt be deeply and ſenſibly felt by every good man, even as he is a man. To this may be added, the loſs of relations, and concerns for the ſufferings of others of every kind, which is always moſt diſtreſſing to the beſt and tendereſt ſpirits. But outward calamities by thoſe that fear God, are felt moſt ſenſibly when they are conſidered as the rod of his anger, and bring ſin to remembrance.

When he viſits his own children with any of his ſore judgements; when he follows them with breach upon breach, they are ready to ſay, "Surely he is ſetting me up as a mark for his arrows, he is counting me his enemy." They are often at a loſs to underſtand the cauſe of his controverſy with

them; and they alſo find it often extremely difficult to bring their minds to a patient and ſubmiſſive reſignation to his holy will. To thoſe who know their duty, and deſire through divine grace to comply with it, it is no ſmall difficulty to be obliged to ſtruggle with a riſing and rebellious heart within, as well as ſuffering from without, and to be alternately calling in queſtion the certainty either of the love of God to them, or of their love to him.

3. A good man may ſometimes walk in darkneſs, from the aſpect of providence, and the ſtate of the Redeemer's kingdom. The works of God are ſought out of them who have pleaſure in them. But when they are not able to penetrate the depths of the divine counſels, this becomes often a ſource both of diſtreſs and temptation. When wicked men are ſuffered to proſper at their will; when the good are oppreſſed by the power and tyranny, or perſecuted by the malice, of their enemies; when the moſt generous attempts for the revival of truth and righteouſneſs are rendered abortive; when the profeſſing ſervants of God are divided into parties, or marſhalled under names, and their zeal made to ſpend itſelf in unneceſſary, ſinful, and hurtful contentions; when offences come, and thoſe of the higheſt profeſſion or attainments are ſuffered to fall into groſs crimes, by which the mouths of enemies are opened to blaſpheme; then may, and muſt we adopt the words of the pſalmiſt; Pſal. lxxiii. 10.—14. "Therefore, his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them. And they ſay, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Moſt High?

Behold, theſe are the ungodly who proſper in the world; they increaſe in riches. Verily, I have cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chaſtened every morning."

I PROCEED now to the *second* and chief thing propoſed from this paſſage, which was, to explain the duty of truſt in God, and to point out its foundation.

Truſt, in the moſt general view we can take of it, may be thus explained. It is a reliance or confidence in God, that however diſcouraging appearances may be for the preſent time, yet, by his power and wiſdom, our deſires and expectations ſhall take place, whether as to deliverance from trouble, or the obtaining of future bleſſings. When we can attain this happy frame of ſpirit, it is an inconceivable relief and eaſe to the mind under ſuffering, and is excellently expreſſed by the pſalmiſt: Pſal. lv. 22. "Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee; he ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved." Let us then endeavour to explain the grounds of this as diſtinctly as poſſible; and God grant that it may be done, not only in a clear, but in a ſolid and ſatisfying manner, ſo as to aſſiſt you in the practice of real and vital religion.

I have already ſaid, that our expectation is from the power and wiſdom of God. May we then reaſonably expect, and is it our duty to believe, that we ſhall receive all that we deſire, and that is

within the reach of divine power and wiſdom? Theſe have no bounds at all. We know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. This ſuggeſts to us, that there is ſomething more neceſſary, in order to lay a proper foundation for truſt, viz. his goodneſs, to make our expectation probable; and his promiſe, to make it certain. Even created beings can often do what they will not. This holds particularly with regard to God, whoſe power is directed in its exerciſe by his goodneſs, and limited by his wiſdom. His goodneſs, in general, encourages us to go to him with a peradventure, or, who can tell whether he may not be gracious? But in order to make our truſt both diſtinct and ſtrong, we muſt go to his promiſe; "for he is faithful, and keepeth covenant and truth for ever." Truſt, then, my brethren, reſts ultimately on the promiſe. It muſt be preciſely commenſurate, or of the ſame extent with the promiſes. Whoever doubts or calls in queſtion the certainty of what God hath promiſed, is chargeable with diſtruſt; and whoever expects to receive, in kind or degree, more than he has promiſed, is ſo far guilty of preſumption. This is the general rule, and I think it carries ſuch evidence with it, that every one muſt be ſenſible it is juſt, who hath heard it with any meaſure of attention.

But the great difficulty yet remains, which is, to apply this rule to the various caſes that occur in the ſpiritual life, and to tell any particular perſon

what it is his duty firmly to believe, and hope he ſhall receive from God, and what it would be preſumptuous and ſinful in him to fix his expectation on. This is plainly of the greater importance, that the more particular our truſt is, as to the object of deſire, it is the more powerful a ſupport to the mind. At the ſame time it frequently happens, that the more particularly our deſires are formed, the foundation of our hope appears the more uncertain and queſtionable. On this account, you may obſerve, that it is of the greateſt moment to underſtand the nature and tenor of the promiſes, or rather, indeed, to explain the foundation of truth; and to explain the nature and tenor of the promiſes, is one and the ſame thing.

For this end, it may be proper to diſtinguiſh the promiſes of God, as to futurity, into two heads, abſolute, and conditional. By abſolute promiſes, in this place, I underſtand only thoſe that are ſo in the moſt unlimited ſenſe, that is to ſay, revealed as part of the fixed plan of providence, ſuſpended on no terms but what all, of every character, may expect will certainly come to paſs. Such are the promiſes after the flood, that ſummer and winter, ſeed-time and harveſt, ſhould not fail; the coming of Chriſt in the fleſh, at the fulneſs of time, to the ancient patriarchs, and to us; the downfall of Antichriſt; the preſervation of a church on earth, let its enemies be or do what they will; the calling of God's ancient people the Jews; and the coming of Chriſt to judge the world at the laſt day. Theſe are all called promiſes in ſcripture; and ſo far

as they can be of any uſe to the people of God, either for direction in duty, or reſtraint from ſin, or conſolation under trial, they are to be depended on in the moſt abſolute manner; for they reſt upon the certainty of the holy ſcriptures, and the truth of the unchangeable God, who "is not a man that he ſhould lie, nor the ſon of man that he ſhould repent."

SERMON IV.

TRUST IN GOD.

ISAIAH, l. 10.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

HAVING, in a former discourse, opened the character and state of those who are called upon and exhorted to trust in the name of the Lord, and entered upon the second thing proposed, which was to explain the duty of trust in God, and to point out its foundation; and having in this view considered the nature of absolute promises, I proceed,

II. To consider the nature and use of conditional promises. These I am obliged, for greater distinctness, to divide into three different heads. 1. There are promises made to persons of such or such a character, or in such or such a state. 2. There are promises, the performance of which is suspended on our compliance with something previously required, as the condition of obtaining them. 3.

There are promiſes, not only ſuſpended on both the preceding terms, but upon the ſuppoſition of ſome circumſtances in themſelves uncertain, or to us unknown. Let us conſider each of theſe with care and attention.

1. There are promiſes made to perſons of ſuch or ſuch a character, or in ſuch or ſuch a ſtate, which are therefore to be applied, and reſted on, according to the evidence of our being of this character, or in this ſtate, is clear or obſcure. In this I have particularly in view, the bleſſings of ſalvation, the pardon of ſin, peace with God, the ſpirit of ſanctification, and a right to everlaſting life. Theſe all lie in an unbroken chain and inſeparable connection, and might have been more briefly expreſſed by an intereſt in Chriſt the Saviour, who is the author, ſource, and ſum of theſe bleſſings; "for all the promiſes of God in him, are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us." Let no judicious attentive hearer be ſurpriſed or diſſatisfied, that I have ranked theſe among conditional promiſes; for you may obſerve, that I have expreſſed myſelf thus, they are promiſes made to perſons of ſuch or ſuch a character, or in ſuch or ſuch a ſtate. In this, they certainly differ from the promiſes, properly abſolute, mentioned above. It is far from my intention to do injury to that fundamental truth, That ſalvation is by grace. I eſteem that doctrine which proceeds upon a ſelf-righteous ſyſtem, to be contrary to the word of God, and moſt pernicious to the ſouls of men. There is nothing at all required in ſcripture to be performed by us, as a purchaſing or meriting condition. Every gracious act of the

divine government in our favour, is the fruit of the Redeemer's purchase; and every holy disposition wrought in us, is the effect of his almighty grace. But it is certain, at the same time, that in order to our accepting those blessings, we must be truly and deeply humbled, and see ourselves to be incapable and helpless. We must be unfeignedly willing to renounce all claim of merit, and accept of salvation as it is offered in the gospel; that is, in its full extent, and in the free and sovereign manner of its communication. So far, surely, we must say, the promises of the gospel are conditional, or wholly pervert the word of God. I know of no promises, then, to the unbelieving and impenitent, unless you call that a promise, that they shall have "their portion in the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone; and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."

Hear it, my dear brethren, it is the needy, thirsty, sensible soul, that is invited to come and find rest: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If any shall think fit further to say, that the very destination of the vessels of mercy is of God's sovereign pleasure, that conviction itself is by a day of his power, and that faith which interests us in Christ's righteousness is his gift; I agree to the whole, but observe, that it is improperly introduced here. No use can possibly be made of the divine decree in the application of the promises.

It is inverting the order of things. Can any man say, 'I truſt in the mercy of God, becauſe I have been ordained to everlaſting life?' No man can derive comfort from this, till by his effectual calling it is publiſhed, and begins to be accompliſhed; and then he may look back with wonder and gratitude to that everlaſting love, by which he was choſen in Chriſt, before the foundation of the world. Can you judge of the fruit of a tree by looking upon the root? No, but you judge of the ſtrength and deepneſs of the root, by the fulneſs of the fruit, and the vigour and verdure of the branches. From an improper mixture of what belongs to the ſecret will of God, and what belongs to us as our duty, much error and confuſion ariſes.

Now, my brethren, as to the application of theſe promiſes of pardon and peace, the humbled ſinner, the man among us who walketh in darkneſs and hath no light, who is burdened with a ſenſe of guilt, and diſcouraged by the threatenings of the law, the accuſations of conſcience, and the pure and holy nature of God, who perhaps has all this aggravated by diſtreſs and trouble, is called to truſt in the name of the Lord, and ſtay himſelf upon his God. He is invited to conſider and reſt upon the extent of the call, the immutability of the promiſe, and the riches of divine grace. If he is ſo far from pleading any merit in himſelf, or being diſſatisfied with the plan of ſalvation laid down in the goſpel, that he is making every thing an argument againſt himſelf, and dare not lay hold of, or appropriate ſuch mercy; this is juſt the effect of diſtruſt, and he is called, in the ſtrongeſt manner, in the text,

to "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." With how many gracious assurances for this purpose is the scripture filled. John, vi. 37. "All that the Father hath given me shall come to me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Heb. vii. 25. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Rev. xxii. 17. "And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." All things, Christ excepted, are to be renounced, and the all-sufficiency of a Redeemer is to be the foundation of our hope. The penitent will say with the apostle, Phil. iii. 8. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith."

2. There is a second class of promises, the performance of which is suspended on our previous compliance with something required as the condition of obtaining them. In these we are not only called to accept of the divine mercy, but commanded to obey the divine will. The order in which I have placed these, will, I hope, prevent you from misunderstanding or misapplying what may be said on them. This class includes all the pro-

miſes in ſcripture regarding the daily progreſs of a believer in his ſanctification and conformity to God, as well as the increaſe of his comfort and peace. I am ſenſible that as the reconciliation of a ſinner to God, and his right to what is called in ſcripture *the promise* of eternal life, is of free and unmerited mercy, ſo, no doubt, all the inferior or ſubordinate promiſes flow from the ſame ſource; nay, in a certain meaſure, they are entirely upon the ſame footing with thoſe formerly mentioned; that is to ſay, final perſeverance, real growth in the ſpiritual life, and neceſſary comfort, are the ſure and purchaſed portion of every one that is born of God. Rom. viii. 29. "For whom he did foreknow, he alſo did predeſtinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firſt-born among many brethren." But in the diſtribution of thoſe gifts, particularly in their meaſure, there is not only an unknown regard to the good pleaſure of God, but a known and eſtabliſhed regard to our conduct in duty. Thus, the abundant ſupply of the Spirit is the fruit and return of diligence in prayer. Matth. vii. 7. "Aſk and it ſhall be given you, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be opened unto you." See alſo Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25. compared with the 37th, "Then will I ſprinkle clean water upon you, and ye ſhall be clean; from all your filthineſs, and from all your idols will I cleanſe you," &c. "Thus ſaith the Lord, Yet for all this will I be inquired of by the houſe of Iſrael, to do it for them." Thus alſo inward conſolation, as well as outward ſecurity, is expreſsly promiſed as the effect and reward of uniformity and diligence in

duty. Iſaiah, xxxii. 17. "And the work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs quietneſs and aſſurance for ever." As the counterpart and illuſtration of this, you ſee, that a departure from the path of duty brings on the threatened, or perhaps I ought to call it the promiſed, rod of correction. Pſal. lxxxix. 30.—33. "But if his children ſhall forſake my law, and not walk in my judgements; if they break my ſtatutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I viſit their tranſgreſſions with the rod, and their iniquities with ſtripes. Nevertheleſs, my loving-kindneſs will I not take from him, nor ſuffer my faithfulneſs to fail." In the ſame manner, If. xl. 30. 31. "Even the youths ſhall faint and be weary, and the young men ſhall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord ſhall renew their ſtrength; they ſhall mount up with wings as eagles; they ſhall run and not be weary, they ſhall walk and not faint." Agreeably to all this, you know, our bleſſed Lord preſcribed watchfulneſs and prayer as the great preſervatives againſt temptation, and whoever expects either ſpiritual ſtrength or comfort, while he relaxes his diligence in the way of duty, is guilty of that ſin which is called in ſcripture tempting God; and ſhall aſſuredly meet with a dreadful diſappointment.

My brethren, as much of the daily exerciſe of real believers regards their progreſs in ſanctification, and their peace and comfort, it is proper that you ſhould carefully attend to the tenor of theſe promiſes, and to what ought to be your reliance upon

them. I ſhall ſum up, in a few particulars, what I apprehend to be of moſt importance.

1. Truſt in theſe promiſes implies ſelf-denial, and a deep ſenſe of your weakneſs. Theſe promiſes would be unneceſſary and ſuperfluous, were we not inſufficient of ourſelves for any thing that is good. Truſt in God ſtands directly oppoſed to all ſelf-dependence. Proverbs, iii. 5. "Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own underſtanding." How jealous God is, if I may ſpeak ſo, of the honour that is due to him in this reſpect, may be ſeen from the many foul and ſhameful crimes into which he permitted ſome of his beſt ſaints to fall, when they were off their guard by ſloth, or, ſtill more, provoked him by pride and preſumption. Noah's drunkenneſs, Moſes's paſſion, David's adultery and murder, and Peter's denial of his Maſter. 1 Cor. x. 11. 12. "Now all theſe things happened unto them for enſamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall." For this reaſon the apoſtle Paul ſays with great propriety, and with great force, which is equally applicable to himſelf and other believers, a ſeeming paradox, 1 Cor. xii. 10. "For when I am weak, then I am ſtrong."

2. As we are to put no truſt in ourſelves, ſo we are to exerciſe the moſt unſhaken confidence of our being able to diſcharge any duty, or undergo any trial, by the help of the Almighty. O! how ready are we to ſin on both hands! How often do we preſume upon our own ſtrength, and forget the neceſſity

of applying for divine aid? And on the other hand, how prone are we to timidity or deſpondence in difficult caſes? When corruptions have long kept their ground, we are ready to dread their influence, and to make but little out of the promiſes in ſcripture, that we ſhall be made "more than conquerors through him that loved us." We have learned, by ſad experience, that in us dwelleth no good thing; and yet it is long before we will attend to the leſſon that follows hard upon it, "My grace is ſufficient for thee, and ſtrength ſhall be made perfect in weakneſs."

3. As theſe promiſes are expreſsly made to the diligent, you muſt ſtill remember that your own attention and application to duty is eſſentially neceſſary, and that the aſſiſtance promiſed from on high, is always repreſented in ſcripture as an argument and encouragement to diligence, and not a warrant or excuſe for ſloth. Philip. ii. 12. "Work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleaſure." It is alſo well worthy of notice, that the ſame prophet, Ezekiel, who ſays, chap. xxxvi. 26. "A new heart alſo will I give you, and a new ſpirit will I put within you," changes the form of his expreſſion; and in another place, chap. xviii. 31. 32. ſpeaks in the following terms; "Caſt away from you all your tranſgreſſions whereby ye have tranſgreſſed; and make ye a new heart and a new ſpirit; for why will ye die, O houſe of Iſrael? For I have no pleaſure in the death of him that dieth, ſaith the Lord God;

wherefore turn yourſelves, and live ye." In conſequence of this,

4. In the *laſt* place, truſt in God will make us ready to acknowledge, that when we fail in duty, when we forget or break our reſolutions, the fault is certainly in ourſelves. It is impoſſible to excuſe or juſtify ourſelves in any degree, without laying the blame, in the ſame proportion, upon God, and calling in queſtion his faithfulneſs and truth. But whatever our treacherous hearts may ſinfully ſuggeſt, we are not ſtraitened in God, but ſtraitened in our own bowels. We find him pleading his own cauſe, in this reſpect, in many paſſages of ſcripture. Iſa. lix. 1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not ſhortened, that it cannot ſave; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your ſins have ſeparated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Upon the whole, truſt in theſe promiſes is no other than an humble and diligent application to duty, under a deep ſenſe of weakneſs, and dependence on promiſed ſtrength, accompanied with a firm perſuaſion, that "in the name of the Lord we ſhall "tread down our enemies," and go on from ſtrength to ſtrength, "till we appear before God in Zion."

3. Another claſs of promiſes are thoſe that are ſuſpended, not only on the ſame conditions with the two former, but upon ſome other circumſtances in themſelves uncertain, or to us unſeen. Theſe are temporal mercies, or rather temporal proſperity, deliverance from preſent diſtreſs, and abundance or affluence of outward enjoyments. Perhaps we may

alſo add, ſpiritual conſolation, and ſenſible joy in God. I find no temporal promiſe preciſely fixed to the ſervant of God but this, "Bread ſhall be given him, and his water ſhall be ſure;" and it is certainly his duty, in the moſt ſtraitening circumſtances, to maintain a confident dependence on the power and wiſdom of Providence for neceſſary ſupply. I do not condemn thoſe, who, when reduced to extremity, have actually pleaded this divine promiſe, and againſt hope have believed in hope: and I am perſuaded inſtances have not been wanting, of relief furniſhed in a manner next to miraculous. But as to every other degree of temporal proſperity, God hath reſerved it in his own hand to give or with-hold it at his pleaſure, that is, as he ſees it will be moſt for his glory, and the benefit of his people. It is lawful, then, my brethren, for you to endeavour to procure, by honeſt induſtry, the increaſe of your ſubſtance, to look well to the ſtate of your flocks and your herds, and to aſk by prayer the bleſſing of God upon your labours. It is lawful, and it is your duty, by regularity and care, to preſerve life and health, as well as to aſk of the Father of your ſpirits recovery from ſickneſs, or deliverance from any other kind of diſtreſs. But you are not warranted to believe that theſe petitions ſhall be granted in hand, or in your own time and meaſure, even though you aſk them in ſincerity with the prayer of faith. There may be reaſons for withholding them, and yet you may be accepted in your prayers. An infinitely wiſe God knows beſt what is for your good, and he only hath a right to determine in what part of his own ſervice, where,

and how long, he ſhall employ you. Truſt in God, therefore, in this reſpect, implies a careful attention to the tenor of the promiſes with regard to temporal mercies, and not to look for, or, even if poſſible, deſire what he hath not promiſed to beſtow.

If I am not miſtaken, we ſhall find it of moment, upon this ſubject, to obſerve, both what he hath not, and what he hath certainly promiſed. He has no where promiſed that his people ſhall be the richeſt or the greateſt on earth; but he hath certainly promiſed to bleſs their proviſion, and aſſured them that a little that a juſt man hath ſhall be better than the riches of many wicked. He has not promiſed that they ſhall be free from ſufferings; but he hath certainly promiſed to ſupport them by his own preſence under their diſtreſs. Iſa. xliii. 2. "When thou paſſeſt through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they ſhall not overflow thee; when thou walkeſt through the fire, thou ſhalt not be burned; neither ſhall the flame kindle upon thee." The truth is, he hath promiſed that "all things ſhall work together for their good." In one word, they have indeed all mercies promiſed, only they themſelves are not in a condition at preſent to judge what they may uſe with ſafety, and what not. As the heir of an opulent eſtate, though he is proprietor of all, yet is laid under reſtraint while in infancy and non-age, becauſe he would ſoon ruin himſelf if it were committed to his own management; ſo the believer, though an heir of God, and joint-heir with Chriſt, yet till he is meet for the inheritance, he muſt be at his Maker's and Redeemer's diſpoſal. Take in,

therefore, only this limitation, and then ſee his extenſive charter: 1 Cor. iii. 21. "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things preſent, or things to come; are all yours; and ye are Chriſt's, and Chriſt is God's." What, then, is the duty of a child of God? It is to breathe after more and more ſubmiſſion to the divine will, and to annex this reſervation to every petition of a temporal nature, "Nevertheleſs, not my will, but thine be done." And O! my brethren, how happy the perſon who hath ſeen the weakneſs of human judgement; who waits the intimation of God's will, before he will ſuffer his deſires to faſten with eagerneſs on any earthly comfort, and who endeavours to keep himſelf free from perplexity, by an humble and ſubmiſſive reliance on the all-ſufficiency of God.

I obſerved, in entering on this part of the ſubject, that ſpiritual conſolation, or ſenſible joy in God, is to be conſidered as a promiſe of the ſame claſs, which muſt, therefore, be aſked with ſubmiſſion, and is diſpenſed according to the good pleaſure of a gracious but ſovereign God. I am ſenſible, as has been formerly obſerved with another view, that ſome degree of comfort neceſſarily follows from a believer's relation to God; but many pious perſons ſeem to deſire and to expect ſenſible comfort in a higher meaſure than God ſees it meet to give them, or than is proper for them in the preſent ſtate. It is with ſpiritual proſperity as with temporal, every one cannot bear it. Therefore, it is our duty ſtill to be ſenſible that we have much more comfort and peace than we deſerve; and as we de-

ſire and ſtrive for greater degrees of it, to accompany theſe deſires with much humility and reſignation to the will of God.

I PROCEED now to the *laſt* thing propoſed, which was, to make a practical application of this ſubject for your inſtruction and direction.

1. From what has been ſaid, you may ſee what judgement you ought to form of inward ſuggeſtions, and ſtrong or particular impreſſions upon your minds. There are ſome extremely prone to interpret a text of ſcripture ſuddenly ſuggeſted to their minds, or any ſtrong impreſſion made on them, as an immediate meſſage from God, to be directly applied to themſelves: Others, in oppoſition to this, as enthuſiaſtical and viſionary, ſeem to give up every expectation of being able to ſay with the pſalmiſt, "I bleſs the Lord who hath given me counſel; my reins alſo inſtruct me in the night-ſeaſon." I beg, therefore, that you may obſerve, that the ſuggeſtion of a paſſage of ſcripture of itſelf gives no title to the immediate application of it, becauſe the great deceiver may undoubtedly ſuggeſt ſcripture, as we find he could reaſon from it in our Saviour's temptation. We are, in every ſuch caſe, to conſider the tenor of it, if it be a promiſe or encouragement, that is, how and in what manner it may be ſafely applied. If any thing happens to be ſuggeſted that expreſsly ſuits our preſent condition, either by ſetting home the obligation of duty, with particular evidence upon the conſcience, or pointing out the grounds of comfort, it ought to be thankfully acknowledged as from the Spirit of God. For example, if a perſon under the power

of a ſpirit of bondage, and fear of divine wrath, hath ſuggeſted to him any of the extenſive gracious aſſurances of mercy to the chief of ſinners, it is his duty to lay hold of it. It is directly ſuited to his condition, and would be the very thing that a wiſe and judicious paſtor would recommend to him for his relief. He may, therefore, without heſitation, bleſs God for it, if it is brought with power and efficacy upon his heart. In the ſame manner, if a perſon under trouble had ſuggeſted to him any of the promiſes of ſupport under it, ſurely he ought, in the diſcharge of his duty, firmly to rely on the accompliſhment of that part of the word of God. But in the reflex examination of a perſon's character or ſtate, to apply the ſudden ſuggeſtion of a promiſe or privilege, perhaps of a conditional nature, is certainly both ſinful and dangerous: Sinful, becauſe without warrant; and dangerous, becauſe leading to deluſion.

2. From what hath been ſaid, you may ſee what it is that we ought to ſeek for with the greateſt earneſtneſs, and may hope to obtain with the greateſt confidence. Recollect, I beſeech you, the order in which I have mentioned the promiſes of God as the objects of truſt and reliance. Firſt of all, the promiſes of ſalvation, deliverance from the guilt of ſin, and a right to everlaſting life; next, whatever is neceſſary to the preſervation and improvement of the ſpiritual life; and then, in the third place, proper accommodation and ſuitable proviſion in our paſſage through the preſent world. They are ranked according to their value in themſelves, and the value which we ſhould put upon them. Let us, therefore, take care that we never violate this order,

which is neceſſary, not only becauſe of their comparative value, but becauſe of their mutual influence one upon another. It is in vain for us to expect to attain to the habit or practice of holineſs, till we are united to God by faith in Jeſus Chriſt. All the promiſes of the goſpel are ratified in him. All the divine fulneſs is treaſured up in him. Every divine gift is diſpenſed by him. Therefore, he ſays, John, xv. 4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." And the apoſtle Paul, Gal. ii. 20. "I am crucified with Chriſt: nevertheleſs I live; yet not I, but Chriſt liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the fleſh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himſelf for me."

In the ſame manner, nothing can be more preposterous, than to fix our affections upon temporal mercies, or our attention upon the promiſes that relate to them, ſo as to loſe view of our intereſt in God's favour, and the progreſs of our ſanctification. All the temporal promiſes in ſcripture are made to the children of God as ſuch, and for carrying on the purpoſes of his grace in them. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of theſe things. There is no promiſe in the whole volume of inſpiration to the wicked and impenitent. "There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked." He will either rebuke them in his wrath, and chaſten them in his hot diſpleaſure, or give them up to a curſed, hardening, ſtupifying proſperity, than which no ſtate on earth is more to be dreaded. Chriſtian! never ſuffer an anxiety about your outward ſtate to ſupplant, or go before, or even to be ſeparated from

a concern that you may not be found wanting when weighed in the balance of the ſanctuary.

3. Let me beſeech you to adore the wiſdom, juſtice, and mercy of God, in the order he hath eſtabliſhed, according to the different nature of the promiſes. That which is of moſt, nay, properly ſpeaking, of unſpeakable value, and radically contains all the reſt, is placed firſt in order, and offered in the moſt free and gracious manner, without money and without price. Salvation is preached to the chief of ſinners, and a Saviour held forth as able to ſave to the uttermoſt all that come to God by him. Many uſes might be made of this; but the ſingle uſe I intend to make of it at preſent, as connected with the duty of truſt, is to ſilence the complaints of envy and impatience. How prone are many to look with an evil eye upon the more extenſive poſſeſſions, and greater apparent outward comfort, which others enjoy? Does it not aſtoniſh you to think how much unbelief and ingratitude there is in thoſe repining thoughts? Meanneſs of rank, and poverty of ſtate, are no hinderance at all to an intereſt in Chriſt, and a right to everlaſting life. Nay, the goſpel is preached to the poor. Many a Lazarus has been carried by the angels to Abraham's boſom, while the rich and luxurious have lifted up their eyes in torments. Will you, can you, dare you complain? Will you envy the man of the world his ſtately palace, his elegant furniture, and his ſumptuous fare? What is the ampleſt portion in the preſent life, compared with the ſure mercies of David? What child of God

would exchange with any wicked man, a priſon for a palace, or a ſcaffold for a throne?

I beſeech you to add to all this, that, even with regard to preſent peace or comfort, there is no compariſon between a good man and a bad. "A man's life doth not conſiſt in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſes." This is a truth, not only often repeated in the ſacred oracles, but written in the cleareſt and moſt legible characters in the hiſtory of providence. Nay, even independently of virtue or religion itſelf, every human calamity, whether ariſing from ſickneſs, reproach, contention, fear, or ungratified deſire, rages with greater violence in the higher, than in the lower ſtations of life. A vain and conceited monarch once ſent to aſk at an heathen oracle, Who was the happieſt man on earth? and met with a deſerved diſappointment in the reply. If you ſhould put a queſtion much more profitable, as well as much more eaſily reſolved, In what rank of life the moſt exquiſite human miſery has been found? I have no doubt but it ought to be anſwered, Upon a throne. Experience will always ratify the wiſe man's obſervation: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a ſtalled ox and hatred therewith." A ſanctified lot is an ineſtimable treaſure. The bleſſing of God on a cruiſe of oil, and a pot of meal, is better than inexhauſtible mines of gold and ſilver. What cauſe of contentment and patience to the child of God!

In the *laſt* place, you may learn from what has been ſaid on the ſubject, what is the plaineſt, the ſhorteſt, and indeed the only ſure way to deliverance from diſtreſs or calamity, of whatever kind.

It is to fly to the mercy of God through the blood of Chriſt, to renew the exerciſes of faith in him; and, in proportion as it pleaſes God to fill you with all joy and peace in believing, you will perceive every other covenant-bleſſing flow clear and unmixed from this inexhauſted ſource. It will lead to repentance, humiliation, and ſubmiſſion. The ſanctified uſe of the affliction will be obtained, and this brings deliverance of itſelf; for no rod will be continued longer than it has anſwered its end. At any rate, when ſuffering is neceſſary, grace, to ſuffer with patience, ſhall not be with-held. Would you have any more? and is not this remedy always at hand? Can the pooreſt man ſay it is not within reach of his purſe? It is, at once, effectual and univerſal. It was once ſaid in contempt of a worthy and pious miniſter, that he made ſo much of the blood of Chriſt, that he would apply it even to a broken bone. But bating what may be thought indecent in the expreſſion, choſen on purpoſe to bring a good man into ridicule, the thing itſelf, I make bold to affirm, is a great and a precious truth. Faith in the blood of Chriſt makes a man ſuperior to all ſufferings. It ſoftens their aſpect, it abates their ſeverity, nay, it changes their nature. When a man is under diſtreſs or calamity of any kind, and conſiders it only in itſelf, and independently of his relation to God, it retains its old nature, and taſtes with all the bitterneſs of the original curſe; but when it is conſidered as limited in its nature, in its meaſure and its continuance, by a kind Saviour, the believer ſubmits to it with patience, as a part of his Creator's will; bears it with pa-

tience in his Redeemer's ſtrength, and ſometimes is enabled to embrace it with pleaſure, as ſerving to carry him to his Father's preſence. Is this going too far? No, my dear brethren; theſe are great realities, to which the word of God, and the experience of his ſaints, bear united evidence. Many here preſent, I doubt not, have been witneſſes of this truth in the carriage of their relations now with God; and not a few, I truſt, will repeat the teſtimony to ſucceeding ages. I conclude all with that animated paſſage of the apoſtle Paul, 2 Cor. iv. 16. 17. "For which cauſe we faint not; but though our outward man periſh, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

SERMON V.

ON THE PURITY OF THE HEART.

PROVERBS, xxx. 7. 8. 9.

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

MY BRETHREN,

OUR dependent condition as creatures, and much more our dangerous condition as ſinners, expoſed to daily temptation, renders prayer a duty of the moſt abſolute neceſſity. You muſt all be ſenſible, how frequent and preſſing the exhortations to it are in the holy ſcriptures. And indeed there cannot be a better evidence of a right temper of mind, than an habitual diſpoſition to the exerciſe of this duty.

But as prayer is a neceſſary duty, we ought to give the greater attention to the manner in which it is performed. We ought to aſk only for ſuch things

as are truly safe and useful. We ought also to offer up our prayers with importunity, or reserve, according to the nature and comparative importance of those blessings we desire to obtain. All our wants are perfectly known to God; he is also the best judge of what is fit for us; and therefore our petitions should be well weighed, and expressed in such terms, as, at the same time that they intimate our desires, leave much to himself, as to the measure and manner of satisfying them.

We have an excellent example of this pious and prudent conduct, in the prayer of the prophet Agur, just read in your hearing. All his requests are summed up in two general heads. These he seems to insist upon, as absolutely necessary to ask, with that humble, holy confidence which is founded on the divine promise, that if we ask any thing agreeable to his will, he heareth us. He seems also to ask them as what would fully satisfy him, and be sufficient for the comfort of the present life, and the happiness of the life to come. "Two things," says he, "have I required of thee; deny me them not before," or, as it ought rather to be translated, "until I die."

These two requests are conceived in the following terms: "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches." The first, viz. "Remove far from me vanity and lies," evidently relates to the temper of his mind, and the state of his soul. The second, viz. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," relates to his outward condition or circumstances in the present life. There are two things in the general structure of this compre-

henſive prayer, that merit your particular attention. *First*, The order of his requeſt,—beginning with what is of moſt importance, the temper of his mind, and his hope towards God; and then adding, as but deſerving the ſecond place, what related to his preſent accommodation.

Secondly, The connection of his requeſts. The choice he makes as to his temporal condition, is in immediate and direct ſubſerviency to his ſanctification. This is plain from the arguments with which he preſſes, or the reaſons which he aſſigns, for his ſecond petition? "Give me neither poverty nor riches, leſt I be full and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor, and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain."

My brethren, I am perſuaded, that this ſubject can hardly be, at any time, unſeaſonable to a Chriſtian aſſembly, as our miſplaced, exceſſive, and unreaſonable deſires are the greateſt enemies to our progreſs in holineſs, as well as to our comfort and peace. Perhaps, however, there are ſome circumſtances that render it peculiarly proper for this auditory. Young perſons are very apt to cheriſh vaſt and boundleſs deſires as to outward things; and, having not yet experienced the deceitfulneſs of the world, are apt to entertain exceſſive and extravagant hopes. The truth is, rich and poor, young and old, may here receive a leſſon of the utmoſt moment.

Let me therefore intreat your attention, while I endeavour to open and improve this paſſage of the holy ſcriptures, beginning, at this time, with

the firſt requeſt: "Remove far from me vanity and lies."

In diſcourſing on which, I will endeavour,

I. To explain the import of it, or ſhew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be ſuppoſed to extend.

II. Apply the ſubject for your inſtruction and direction.

I. I AM to explain the import of the prophet's prayer, or ſhew at what it chiefly points, and to what it may be ſuppoſed to extend, in the petition, "Remove far from me vanity and lies." The word *vanity*, eſpecially when it is joined, as it is frequently in ſcripture, with *lying*, or *lies*, is of a very large and comprehenſive ſignification. The word in the original, tranſlated *vanity*, properly ſignifies *lightness* or *emptiness;* and *lies* ſignify *falsehood*, in oppoſition to *truth*.

I imagine we ſhall have a clear conception, both of the meaning and force of this phraſe, if we make the following remark: God himſelf is the great fountain of life and exiſtence; the great I AM, as he emphatically ſtyles himſelf to Moſes; the *original* and the *only reality*, if I may ſo ſpeak. All other beings have only a dependent and precarious exiſtence; ſo that the creation itſelf, though his own work, compared to him, is vanity: "Vanity of vanities, ſaith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Therefore, in a particular manner, the word is often uſed to denote the folly of all idolatrous worſhip, or the giving the reſpect and honour to any thing elſe which is due to God

alone: "They have moved me to jealouſy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cauſe rain? or can the heavens give ſhowers? art thou not he, O Lord our God?"

Sometimes it is uſed to denote the *folly* or *unprofitableness* of any vice, and particularly of an ill-founded conceit of ourſelves, as well as of all fraud and diſſimulation, in word or action. So that this prayer for our ſouls, ſhort as it appears to be, when conſidered in its full extent, will be found to contain a great variety of important matter. This I ſhall endeavour to give you a brief account of, under the following particulars.

1. We are hereby taught to pray, that we may be preſerved by divine grace from all falſe and erroneous principles in religion, ſo as we may neither be deceived by them ourſelves, nor any way inſtrumental in deceiving others. This, by what has been ſaid of the uſe of the words in ſcripture, appears to be implied in the requeſt; and it is of more moment than ſome are willing to allow. The underſtanding being the leading faculty, an error *there* ſpreads its unhappy influence through the whole temper and life. Whereas, on the contrary, light in the mind produces fidelity and ſecurity in the conſcience, and tenderneſs in the converſation. You may obſerve, that through the whole hiſtory of the Old and New Teſtament, idolatry, or a departure from the knowledge and worſhip of the true God, is the leading ſin, and the fruitful ſource of every other vicious practice. We

ſometimes, indeed, ſeem to ſtand aſtoniſhed at the exceſſive proneneſs of the ancient Jews to this ſin. But we need only a little reflection to diſcover, that an evil heart of unbelief continues the ſame at bottom, and daily produces the like dangerous effects. How prone have men been in all ages, to depart from the ſimplicity of the truth! In how many different ſhapes have they perverted it! One age, or one country, has been polluted by one error, and another by an oppoſite, impelled by the unſtable and irregular fancies of men of corrupt minds. In the laſt age, the great theme of the carnal reaſoner was, to attempt to expoſe the ſcripture-doctrine of God's certain knowledge, and preciſe ordination of all events; and in this, fate and neceſſity have become the ſtrong-hold of infidelity, and are embraced, or ſeem to be embraced, by every enemy of true religion without exception. Error, ſhifting its ground, indeed, is but natural; for lying vanities are innumerable; but the true God is the ſame "yeſterday, to-day, and for ever."

At this very time, how abounding and prevalent is infidelity, calling in queſtion the moſt important and fundamental principles, both of natural and revealed religion! And how properly is this deſcribed by the expreſſion in the text, *vanity and lies*; for it always takes its riſe from the pride and vanity of the human heart! Sometimes from a pride of underſtanding, which aſpires to paſs judgement on things far above its reach, and condemn things long before they are examined and underſtood; ſometimes, alſo, from a pride of heart, or ſelf-

ſufficiency, that is unable to endure the humbling and mortifying view, given us in ſcripture, of our character and ſtate. O how readily do men turn aſide from the truth! With what greedineſs do they drink in the flattering but deſtructive poiſon! Need I point out to you the fatal effects of ſuch principles taking place? It looſens the obligations to obedience, takes off the edge of the reproofs of conſcience; and thus removing reſtraints, leaves men, in the emphatical language of the holy ſcripture, "to walk in the ways of their own hearts, and in the ſight of their own eyes."

But in this requeſt, "remove far from me vanity and lies," I would not have you confine your views to the moſt groſs infidelity and avowed oppoſition to God. Pray alſo, that you may be preſerved from error, or miſtake of any kind; but eſpecially ſuch as have the greateſt influence on the ſubſtance of religion.

A clear apprehenſion of the holy nature and righteous government of God, the infinite evil of ſin, the foundation of our peace in the blood of the atonement, and the renewing of our natures by the Holy Ghoſt, ſeem to me abſolutely neceſſary to true and undefiled religion; and they are the truths which particularly ſerve to exalt the Creator, and lay the creature in the duſt. When, therefore, we conſider how grateful to corrupt nature every thing is that tends to foſter pride, to create ſecurity, and ſet the mind at eaſe in the indulgence of ſin; we muſt be ſenſible of how great importance it is, to pray for divine direction, and divine preſervation. Nothing is more dangerous to men than confidence

and presumption; nothing more useful in faith and practice, than humility and self-denial.

2. This prayer implies a desire, that we may be preserved from setting our affections on such objects as are but vain and unsatisfying, and will, in the end, disappoint our expectation. I take this to be not only a part, but a very important part of the prophet's meaning. The world is the great source of temptation; the powerful and unhappy influence of which we may daily see, or rather, all of us daily and sensibly feel. What is it possesses the fancy, misleads the judgement, inflames the affections, consumes the time, and ruins the soul, but these present enjoyments, of which the wisest of men, after a full trial of them, hath left us their character, *vanity of vanities!*

I am sensible, that I have now entered upon a subject which is far from being difficult to enlarge upon, and yet, perhaps, very difficult to treat with propriety, or in such a manner as to have the intended effect. There is nothing more easy than, in a bold declamatory way, to draw pictures of the vanity of human life. It hath been done by thousands, when, after all their broken schemes, and disappointed views, they have just suffered shipwreck upon the coast of the enchanted land of hope. But from such men we may expect to hear the language of despair, rather than of experience; and as it is too late for the instruction of the sufferers, so it very rarely has any effect in warning others to avoid the danger. What I would, therefore, willingly attempt, is, to consider this matter in a sober scriptural light, if so be that it may please

God to carry conviction to our hearts, and make it truly useful, both to speaker and hearers.

Let me, therefore, my brethren, point out to you, precisely, wherein the vanity of the world lieth. The world, in itself, is the workmanship of God, and every thing that is done in it is by the ordination or permission of God. As such, it is good, and may be used in subservience to his honour, and our own peace. But through the corruption of our nature, the creature becomes the rival and competitor of the Creator for our hearts. When we place our supreme happiness upon it, instead of making it a mean of leading us to God, then its inherent vanity immediately appears. When men allow themselves in the indulgence of vicious pleasures, how justly may they be called *vanity and lies!* They are smiling and inviting to appearance; but how dreadful and destructive in their effects! "Whoredom and wine, and new wine, take away the heart." Those who refuse to be confined by the laws of piety and sobriety, *vainly* think they are walking at liberty, when they are bringing themselves into subjection to the severest and most inflexible of all masters. Read the just and striking description, by Solomon, of the effects of whoredom; and reflect on the innumerable calamities brought, in every age, on persons and families by unbridled lust. See also the effects of intemperance and excess: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." And again, "The drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it

giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Think on the unhappy consequences of dishonesty and fraud. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel."—You may also see, in innumerable passages of scripture, that oppression of others, as it is a sin of the deepest dye, so it is often remarkably overtaken, and punished in the course of providence, even in the present life. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the forward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

But there is something more in this request, than being preserved from practices directly vicious; for the setting of our hearts upon worldly things, and making them our chief portion and delight, is certainly seeking after vanity and lies. They are far from affording that happiness and peace which we demand of them, and expect from them. "A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked." Can there be any thing more comfortable to experience, than that strong expression—"Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over." You may also find in the word of God, many warnings of the folly of those who travel in the path of ambition, and put their trust in man. "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie. Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in

whom there is no help. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." But the most comprehensive remark of all upon this subject is, that human life itself is so exceedingly precarious, that it must write 'vanity and emptiness' on every thing, the possession and use of which is confined to the present state. "Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth." What a striking picture does our Lord draw of the vanity of human happiness, in that parable of the ground of the rich man, which brought forth plentifully! "And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?"—And while this man is sedulously employed in making provision for a long and happy life, "God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The whole of the preceding representation may be summed up in this excellent sentence of the wise man: "The wicked worketh a deceitful work; but to him that soweth righteously shall be a sure reward."

Now, my brethren, need I add, how prone we are to be led astray, in a greater or less degree, by such "vanity and lies?"—I do not insist upon the many victims which, in every age, have been seen to fall by the destructive hand of vice. How many have been ruined by lust, slain by intemperance, or beggared by dishonesty! But I entreat you particularly to observe, that when we set our affections immoderately upon any earthly object or enjoyment,

or when they are not truly ſanctified, how much they diſappoint our expectation in poſſeſſion, and what ſcenes of diſtreſs we prepare for ourſelves by their removal.

3. This requeſt, "remove far from me vanity and lies," implies, that God would graciouſly preſerve us from deceiving ourſelves, and thinking our character better, and our ſtate ſafer, than it really is. When we take a view of the ſtate of the world, and the conduct of thoſe who have not yet caſt off all belief of eternity and a judgement to come, it is impoſſible to account for their ſecurity, but by a great degree of ſelf-deceit. We may ſay of them with the prophet Iſaiah, "He feedeth of aſhes: a deceived heart hath turned him aſide, that he cannot deliver his ſoul, nor ſay, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" And from the repreſentation given by our Saviour, it is plain, that many ſhall continue in their miſtake, and only be undeceived at the laſt day: "Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven." How awful a reflection this! How dreadful a diſappointment, to diſcover our miſery, only when there is no more hope of eſcaping it! Is there not a poſſibility of this being the caſe with many of you, my brethren; and do you not tremble at the thought? I would not wiſh any, in general, to give way to a ſpirit of bondage, or ſlaviſh fear; but the beſt of the children of God have often diſcovered this holy jealouſy of themſelves: "Who can underſtand his errors? Cleanſe thou me from ſecret faults. Keep back thy ſervant alſo from preſumptuous ſins; let them not have dominion

over me; then ſhall I be upright, and I ſhall be innocent from the great tranſgreſſion." And again, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and ſee if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlaſting."

This leads me naturally to add upon this ſubject, that we ought to pray for preſervation from ſelf-deceit, as to particular branches of our character and conduct, as well as our general ſtate. Many, even upon the whole good men, are occaſionally and inſenſibly brought, for a ſeaſon, under the direction of ſinful paſſions. They may be indulging themſelves, without ſuſpicion, in what is notwithſtanding really provoking to God, injurious or offenſive to others, and, in the iſſue, hurtful to their own peace. They may be making an enjoyment a talent, a relation an idol, when they think they are keeping within the bounds of duty. They may be indulging a ſinful reſentment, when they think they are promoting the glory of God. Many an excuſe for neglecting commanded duty, from prudence or difficulty, ſatisfies ourſelves, which will not ſtand in the day of trial. What reaſon for the prophet's prayer in the ſenſe juſt now aſſigned, "Remove far from me vanity and lies."

4. In the *next* place, this requeſt implies, a deſire to be preſerved from pride and ſelf-conceit upon any ſubject. There is not any thing that affords a ſtronger evidence of our being unacquainted with ourſelves, and our own ſtate, than that propenſity to pride and vanity, which is ſo common to us all. It is thought by many, that pride was the ſin of the

angels, that caſt them down to hell. It is plain, that pride was the main ingredient in the firſt ſin of man. And perhaps it is a juſt and proper deſcription of all ſin as ſuch, that it is a dethroning of God, and ſetting up ſelf to be loved, honoured, and ſerved, in his room. This ſin is by no means confined to the worſt of men, in whom it hath an abſolute dominion; but retains and diſcovers an unhappy influence in the very beſt. Every thing may be the fuel of pride: our perſons, our performances, our relations, our poſſeſſions; nay, ſo pliable, and at the ſame time ſo prepoſterous is this diſpoſition, that men are found ſometimes proud of their very vices and defects. But how ill do pride and vanity ſuit ſuch poor mortals as we are, who ſeem born but to die! who, after paſſing through a longer or ſhorter ſeries of weakneſſes, diſappointments, and troubles, muſt at laſt be laid in the ſilent grave, to moulder in the duſt. We are dependent creatures, who have nothing, and can have nothing, but what we receive from the unmerited favour of God. We are unwiſe and ignorant creatures, who know nothing to the bottom, and therefore are liable to continual miſtakes in our conduct. Thoſe among us who have the greateſt comprehenſion of mind, and know moſt, as it ſerves to ſhew the comparative ignorance of the bulk of mankind, ſo it ſerves to convince themſelves how little they do know, and how little they can know after all, compared with what is to them unſearchable.

But, above all, we are ſinful creatures, who have rendered ourſelves, by our guilt, the juſt objects of divine diſpleaſure. Is there any who dares to plead

exemption from this character? And do pride and vanity become thoſe to whom they manifeſtly belong? Can any thing be more fooliſh, than indulging ſuch diſpoſitions? There is a very juſt expreſſion of one of the apocryphal writers: "Pride was not made for man, nor a high look for him that is born of a woman." Indeed they are ſo evidently unſuitable to our ſtate and circumſtances, that one would think we ſhould need no higher principle than our own reaſon and obſervation to keep us free from them. We do, however, need the moſt earneſt and aſſiduous addreſſes to the throne of grace, to have all pride and vanity removed from us. How hateful is pride to God! We are told, "he reſiſteth the proud." On the contrary, no diſpoſition is more amiable in his ſight than humility. "He giveth grace to the humble." And again: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite ſpirit, and trembleth at my word." "For thus ſaith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whoſe name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him alſo that is of a contrite and humble ſpirit, to revive the ſpirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

It muſt, therefore, be the duty and intereſt of every good man, not only to reſiſt pride and vanity, but to make it a part of his daily ſupplication to God, that he may effectually be delivered from both.

5. In the *laſt* place, this requeſt implies a deſire to be delivered from fraud and diſſimulation of every kind. It is one of the glorious attributes of

God, that he is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He alſo requires of all his ſervants, and is delighted with, truth in the inward parts. But there ſeems to be ſome difficulty in this part of the ſubject, more than in the others. Some will ſay, 'Why pray to be delivered from fraud and diſſimulation? This might be an exhortation to the ſinner, but cannot be the prayer of the penitent. If they are ſincere in their prayer, it ſeems impoſſible there can be any danger of fraud. Fraud implies deliberation and deſign; and though it may be concealed from others upon whom it is exerciſed, it can never be concealed from the perſon in whom it dwells, and by whom it is contrived.' This is the very language of ſome reaſoners, who infer from it, that though there are many other ſins to which a man may be liable without knowing it, yet this can never be the caſe with diſſimulation.

But, my brethren, if we conſider how apt men are, upon a ſudden temptation of fear or ſhame, or the proſpect of ſome advantage to themſelves, to depart from ſtrict veracity, and even to juſtify to their own minds ſome kinds and degrees of deceptions, we ſhall ſee the abſolute neceſſity of making this a part of our prayer to God. Nay, perhaps I may go further and ſay, that we are as ready to deceive ourſelves in this point as in any other.

Upon this important ſubject there is one conſideration to which I earneſtly intreat your attention. Thorough ſincerity, ſimplicity, and truth, upon every ſubject, have, in the world, ſo much the appearance of weakneſs; and, on the contrary, being able to manage and over-reach others, has ſo much

the appearance of ſuperior wiſdom, that men are very liable to temptation from this quarter. It is to be lamented that our language itſelf, if I may ſo ſpeak, has received a criminal taint; for in common diſcourſe the expreſſion, *a plain well-meaning man,* is always apprehended to imply, together with ſincerity, ſome degree of weakneſs; although, indeed, it is a character of all others the moſt noble. In recommendation of this character, let me obſerve, that in this, as in all the particulars mentioned above, "the wicked worketh a deceitful work; but he that walketh uprightly walketh ſurely." Suppoſing a man to have the prudence and diſcretion not to ſpeak without neceſſity, I affirm there is no end which a good man ought to aim at, which may not be more certainly, ſafely, and ſpeedily obtained by the ſtricteſt and moſt inviolable ſincerity, than by any act of diſſimulation whatever.

But, after all, what ſignify any ends of preſent conveniency, which diſſimulation may pretend to anſwer, compared to the favour of God, which is forfeited by it? Hear what the pſalmiſt ſays: "Who ſhall abide in thy tabernacle, who ſhall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteouſneſs, and ſpeaketh the truth in his heart." Let us, therefore, add this to the other views of the prophet's comprehenſive prayer, "Remove far from me vanity and lies."

For the improvement of this part of the ſubject, obſerve,

1. You may learn from it, how to attain, not only a juſtneſs and propriety, but a readineſs and fulneſs in the duty of prayer.

Nothing is a greater hindrance, either to the fervency of our affections, or the force of our expreſſions in prayer, than when the object of our deſires is confuſed and general. But when we perceive clearly what it is that is needful to us, and how much we do need it, this gives us indeed the ſpirit of ſupplication. Perhaps it is more neceſſary to attend to this circumſtance, in what we aſk for our ſouls than for our bodies. When we want any thing that relates to preſent conveniency, it is clearly underſtood, becauſe it is ſenſibly felt. There is no difficulty in crying for deliverance from poverty, ſickneſs, reproach, or any other earthly ſuffering; nay, the difficulty here is not in exciting our deſires, but in moderating them; not in producing fervour, but in promoting ſubmiſſion: But in what relates to our ſouls, becauſe many or moſt temptations are agreeable to the fleſh, we foreſee danger leſs perfectly, and even feel it leſs ſenſibly; therefore, a cloſe and deliberate attention to our ſituation and trials, as opened in the preceding diſcourſe, is of the utmoſt moment, "both to carry us to the throne of grace, and to direct our ſpirit when we are there."

2. What hath been ſaid will ſerve to excite us to habitual watchfulneſs, and to direct our daily converſation. The ſame things that are the ſubjects of prayer, are alſo the objects of diligence. Prayer and diligence are joined by our Saviour, and ought never to be ſeparated by his people. Prayer without watchfulneſs is not ſincere, and watchfulneſs without prayer will not be ſucceſsful. The ſame views of ſin and duty, of the ſtrength and frequency

of temptation, and the weakneſs of the tempted, lead equally to both. Let me beſeech you, then, to walk circumſpectly, not as fools, but as wiſe. Maintain an habitual diffidence of yourſelves. Attend to the various dangers to which you are expoſed. Watchfulneſs of itſelf will ſave you from many temptations, and will give you an inward warrant, and humble confidence, to aſk of God ſupport under, and deliverance from ſuch as it is impoſſible to avoid.

3. In the *laſt* place, ſince every thing comprehended in the petition in the text, is viewed in the light of falſehood and deceit, ſuffer me, in the moſt earneſt manner, to recommend to my hearers, and particularly to all the young perſons under my care, "an invariable adherence to truth, and the moſt undiſguiſed ſimplicity and ſincerity in the whole of their converſation and carriage." I do not know where to begin or end in ſpeaking of the excellency and beauty of ſincerity, or the baſeneſs of falſehood. Sincerity is amiable, honourable, and profitable. It is the moſt ſhining part of a commendable character, and the moſt winning apology for any miſcarriage or unadviſed action. There is ſcarcely any action in itſelf ſo bad, as what is implied in the hardened front of him who covers the truth with a lie: Beſides, it is always a ſign of long practice in wickedneſs. Any man may be ſeduced or ſurpriſed into a fault; but none but the habitual villain can deny it with ſteady calmneſs and obſtinacy. In this reſpect we unhappily find ſome who are young offenders, but old ſinners.

It is not in religion only, but even among worldly men, that lying is counted the utmoſt pitch of baſeneſs; and to be called a liar, *the most insupportable reproach*. No wonder, indeed, for it is the very eſſence of cowardice to dare to do a thing which you have not courage to avow. The very worſt of ſinners are ſenſible of it themſelves, for they deeply reſent the imputation of it; and, if I do not miſtake, have never yet arrived at the abſurdity of defending it. There is ſcarcely any other crime but ſome are profligate enough to boaſt of it; but I do not remember ever to have heard of any who made his boaſt, *that he was a liar*. To crown all, lying is the moſt wretched folly. Juſtly does Solomon ſay, "A lying tongue is but for a moment." It is eaſily diſcovered. Truth is a firm conſiſtent thing, every part of which agrees with, and ſtrongly ſupports another. But lies are not only repugnant to truth, but repugnant to each other; and commonly the means, like a treacherous thief, of the detection of the whole. Let me, therefore, once more recommend to every one of you, the noble character of ſincerity. Endeavour to eſtabliſh your credit in this reſpect ſo entirely, that every word you ſpeak may be beyond the imputation of deceit; ſo that enemies may themſelves be ſenſible, that though you ſhould abuſe them, you will never deceive them.

SERMON VI.

SEEKING A COMPETENCY IN THE WISDOM OF PROVIDENCE.

PROVERBS, XXX. 8.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.

I PROCEED now to consider the second branch of the prophet's prayer, which regards his outward condition or circumstances in the present world. On this subject he expresses himself thus: "Give me neither poverty nor riches."

Do not think, my brethren, that this is a subject of little importance, or that it is unconnected with the spiritual life. On the contrary, there are few things of more moment, than to have our desires of temporal blessings limited and directed in a proper manner. Not only is worldly-mindedness the everlasting ruin of those who are entirely under its dominion; but even good men are liable to many temptations from the same quarter. They may hurt their own peace, give offence to others, or lessen their usefulness, by a sinful attachment to the world, or by

a criminal negligence in not giving a prudent and proper attention to it. Be not surprised that I have mentioned the last of these as well as the first, for the prophet prays for deliverance from the temptation arising from both extremes. Idleness and sloth are as contrary to true religion, as either avarice or ambition; and the habit, when once taken, is perhaps more difficult to remove.

In order to treat this subject with the greater distinctness, I shall, *first*, shew you what we may learn in general from this prayer; *secondly*, explain the particular object of the prophet's desire; and, in the *last* place, make application of what may be said by recommending it to your choice.

I. In the *first* place, then, we may learn in general from this request, that it is lawful to pray for temporal blessings. It is not unworthy of a Christian, whose conversation is in heaven, to ask of God what is necessary to his support and preservation in the present life. If I were to mention all the examples of this in scripture, I should transcribe a great part of the Bible. Though inferior in their nature and value to spiritual blessings, they are necessary in their place; and it is upon this footing they are expressly put by our Saviour: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." They are needful to the prolonging of our natural life till we finish our work, and are fitted for our reward. Therefore, though miracles are a kind of suspension of the laws of nature, and the ordinary course of providence, yet we find God sometimes working a miracle to supply the wants

of his ſervants. It had been no more difficult for God to have kept Elijah from hungering, than to have made the ravens fetch him proviſion; or to have made, as in another caſe, a barrel of meal, or a cruiſe of oil, the laſting and ſufficient ſupport of a whole family. But he chooſes rather to ſupply the wants of his people, than cauſe them to ceaſe, that he may keep their dependence conſtantly in their view, and that a ſenſe of their neceſſities may oblige them to have continual recourſe to him for relief.

Again, we may here learn, that God is the real and proper giver of every temporal, as well as of every ſpiritual bleſſing: a ſentiment this of the utmoſt conſequence, to be engraven upon the heart. We have here an inſtance, out of many, in which truths known and confeſſed by all have notwithſtanding little hold upon the mind. How few are truly ſenſible of their continual obligations to the God of life! Conſider, I beſeech you, that whatever you poſſeſs of any kind, it is the gift of God. He holdeth your ſoul in life, and guards you by his providence in your going out and in your coming in. He covereth your table and filleth your cup. Have you riches? It is by the bleſſing of the God of heaven: "The bleſſing of the Lord," ſaith Solomon, "it maketh rich. But thou ſhalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." Have you credit and reputation? It is God that hideth you from the ſtrife of tongues: "Thou ſhalt be hid from the ſcourge of the tongue; neither ſhalt thou be afraid of deſtruction when it cometh." Have you friends? It

is he that giveth you favour in their ſight. Have you talents and parts? It is the *inſpiration of the Almighty* that giveth thee underſtanding.

II. LET us now explain the particular tenor of this petition, and point out the object of the prophet's deſire: "Give me neither poverty nor riches." It is plain we are not to ſuppoſe the prophet, in any degree, refuſing ſubmiſſion to the will of God, by his thus making choice of a particular ſtate of life. Doubtleſs he reſolved to be at God's diſpoſal, and believed that he was able to ſanctify to him a ſtate of the higheſt proſperity, or of the deepeſt adverſity. It was no diſtruſt of God, but ſelf-denial and diffidence of his own ſtrength, that ſuggeſted this prayer. Therefore, in adjuſting his deſires and expectations, he pitches upon that ſtate that appeared to him liable to the feweſt ſnares. Thus our bleſſed Saviour, though it is his will that we ſhould fear no enemy when going out in divine ſtrength, yet teaches us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

Poverty and riches are here mentioned as the two extremes; in neither of which we ſhould wiſh to be placed, but in a ſafer middle between the two; ſo as, if it pleaſe God, we may neither be urged by preſſing neceſſity, nor over-loaded with ſuch abundance, as we may be in danger of abuſing.

But perhaps ſome will ſay, 'Where is the middle? how ſhall we be able to determine what we ought to deſire, ſince there is ſo immenſe a diſtance, and ſo many intermediate degrees between the extremity of want, and the countleſs treaſures of the wealthy?'

But, my brethren, if we do not hearken to the illuſive calls of ambition, avarice, and luſt, it is by no means difficult to apprehend the meaning of the prophet, and apply it to perſons of every rank. Regard, no doubt, is to be had to the various ſtations in which God hath thought fit to place us. This difference of ſtation requires ſupplies of the conveniencies of life, ſuited to the part we are bound to act. That manner of life which would be decent and liberal in one ſtation, would be reckoned mean and ſordid in another. Therefore, what would be plenty and fulneſs to perſons in inferior ſtations, would be extreme poverty to perſons placed, and called to act, in higher and more exalted ſpheres. But after we have taken in the conſideration of every difference that may happen on this ſcore, there is ſomething in the prayer that belongs in common to *persons of all stations*, namely, that we ſhould be modeſt in our deſires after temporal good things, and take care not to aſk only to gratify a ſenſual inclination, but for what is really neceſſary or uſeful to us. The laſt is reaſonable and allowable; the other is unreaſonable, and juſtly condemned by the apoſtle James: "Ye aſk and receive not, becauſe ye aſk amiſs, that ye may conſume it upon your luſts."

But the firſt part of this requeſt is explained by the laſt, contained in the words, "Feed me with food convenient for me." That we may be able to enter into the true ſpirit of this petition, I ſhall juſt compare it with ſome other ſcriptural forms of prayer on the ſame ſubject, and then endeavour to

point out what I take to be the chief inſtruction intended to be conveyed to us by it.

As to the ſcripture-forms of prayer for temporal proviſion, the precedence is undoubtedly due to that excellent form left us by our Saviour, in which we find this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." You may next attend to the prayer put up by Jacob in ancient times: "And Jacob vowed a vow, ſaying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, ſo that I come again to my father's houſe in peace, then ſhall the Lord be my God." It is more than probable that the apoſtle Paul alludes to Jacob's expreſſion, in his excellent advice to all Chriſtians: "But godlineſs with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a ſnare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in deſtruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while ſome coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows."

It is obvious to remark, that all theſe prayers and this apoſtolic counſel run in the ſame ſtrain. They all begin and are founded upon a regard to God, and a mind rightly diſpoſed towards him: "If the Lord," ſays Jacob, "will be with me." "Remove," ſays Agur in my text, "far from me vanity and lies." Our Saviour begins his prayer with petitions for the glory of God, with which

the happineſs of our ſouls is inſeparably connected; and the apoſtle maintains *godliness* as the great ſource of contentment with our portion in this life.

We may further obſerve, that there is the ſame method obſerved in all theſe prayers. The expreſſions vary a little, but the requeſt is the ſame. Jacob wiſhes for the divine protection, with food to eat, and raiment to put on; Agur, for food convenient for him; and in the Lord's prayer, we aſk for our daily bread. There is no ſpecifying of any particulars, no mention made of this or the other quantity of proviſion. Their deſires are ſummed up in this general requeſt, and the quantity and quality wholly referred to the good pleaſure of God. It is certain that God hath ſometimes granted to his own people, riches in great abundance; and, at the ſame time, has given his bleſſing to enjoy them, and honoured the poſſeſſors, by enabling them to glorify him in the uſe and application of them. But the direct deſire of riches I do not think hath any warrant from precept or example in his word; and when they are beſtowed as a bleſſing, and not a curſe, it is commonly on thoſe who, by their ſuperior concern about the better part, ſhew that they will put them to their proper uſe, as in the caſe of Solomon, recorded in the firſt book of Kings: "In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God ſaid, Aſk what I ſhall give thee. And he ſaid, Give thy ſervant an underſtanding heart. And the ſpeech pleaſed the Lord, that Solomon had aſked this thing. And God ſaid, Becauſe thou haſt aſked this thing, and haſt not aſked for thyſelf long life,

neither haſt aſked riches for thyſelf, nor haſt aſked the life of thine enemies, but haſt aſked for thyſelf underſtanding, to diſcern judgement: Behold, I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wiſe and an underſtanding heart, ſo that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee ſhall any ariſe like unto thee. And I have alſo given thee that which thou haſt not aſked, both riches and honour."

Now, this I take to be the main inſtruction intended to be given us with reſpect to our prayers for temporal mercies, that we ſhould not pretend to ſet bounds to God, but leave the meaſure of them to his determination.

For further explaining this truth, and at the ſame time recommending it to your regard, be pleaſed to attend to the following obſervations.

1. Conſider, that God, infinitely wiſe, as well as gracious, is certainly the beſt judge of what is moſt fit and convenient for us. We know ſo little of ourſelves, that we really know not how we ſhould behave, if placed in particular circumſtances, until we are tried. The world has actually ſeen many examples of thoſe, who were loud in their accuſations of others, behaving worſe when placed in the ſame ſtations. And indeed I ſhould naturally expect, that an impatient, envious, diſobedient ſubject, would, if raiſed to power, be a cruel, inſolent, unjuſt oppreſſor; that a petulant, peeviſh, obſtinate ſervant, would make a capricious, ſevere, unreaſonable maſter.

If we were to carve out our own lot, and to have all our own deſires gratified, there is great reaſon

to presume, we would throw ourselves into the most disagreeable circumstances with regard to our souls, and probably consult but ill for our peace and comfort in this world.

Let me put a few questions to every one that secretly murmurs at his state. Are you sure, that if you were advanced to a place of power and trust, you would be able to carry with prudence, resolution, and integrity? Are you sure, that if you were supplied with riches in great abundance, you would not allow yourselves to wallow in pleasure, or to swell in pride? Are you sure, that if you were raised to high rank, surrounded by flatterers, and worshipped by servants, you would, in that standing, behave with humility and condescension; or that pressed on all hands by business, company, or amusements, you would still religiously save your time for converse with God?

A life of piety in an exalted station is a continual conflict with the strongest opposition. What says experience upon this subject? Solomon did not wholly, and to the end, resist the temptation of riches and dominion. In the whole compass of history, sacred and profane, I do not remember any example of a man's behaving better in point of morals, in a prosperous, than in an afflicted state, excepting one that hath this appearance, viz. Cicero, the Roman orator. His conduct in prosperity was full of dignity, and seemed wholly directed to the public good; whereas in adversity, it was to the last degree mean and abject. But probably the reason of this was, that pride, or rather vanity, was his ruling passion, and the great motive to his

illuſtrious actions; and when he fell into adverſity, this diſpoſition had no ſcope for its exerciſe.

Chriſtians, the Lord knoweth our frame, and is well acquainted with what we are able to bear, and conſequently what ſtate of life will be upon the whole moſt convenient for us. It is, therefore, our intereſt, as well as duty, to refer ourſelves entirely to him, and leave him to chooſe for us. This is not only the doctrine of ſcripture, but ſo agreeable to reaſon and good ſenſe, that it has been acknowledged by ſeveral of the heathen philoſophers, who have expreſſed themſelves in terms perfectly ſimilar to thoſe of the inſpired writings. The prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades, is very remarkable:—That he ſhould beſeech the Supreme God to give him what was good for him, though he ſhould not aſk it; and to with-hold from him whatever would be hurtful, though he ſhould be ſo fooliſh as to pray for it.

2. As God is certainly the beſt judge of what is good for us, ſo reſignation to him is a moſt acceptable expreſſion both of our worſhip and obedience. Single duties are particular acts; reſignation is the very *habit* of obedience. The wiſdom and goodneſs of God are acknowledged in the moſt authentic manner, when his holy and ſovereign providence is humbly ſubmitted to, and cordially approved. Every impatient complaint is an impeachment of Providence; every irregular deſire is an act of rebellion againſt God. Therefore, a ſubmiſſive temper muſt be highly pleaſing to God, and is the way to glorify him in the moſt unexceptionable manner. The rather indeed, as it is im-

poſſible to attain this temper, but by ſincerely laying hold of the covenant of peace, which is ordered in all things and ſure. This teaches us the grounds of ſubmiſſion: This procures for us the grace of ſubmiſſion: This ſtains the pride of all human glory: This changes the nature of our poſſeſſions to us, and us to them: This ſpiritualizes a worldly mind, and makes us know, in our own experience, that all the paths of the Lord, to his own people, are mercy and peace.

3. Such a temper of mind will greatly contribute to our own inward peace. It will be an effectual preſervative from all unrighteous courſes, and unlawful, or even diſhonourable means of increaſing our worldly ſubſtance, and conſequently ſave us from the troubles or dangers to which men expoſe themſelves by ſuch practices. It will preſerve us from perplexing anxiety, and many uneaſy fears for futurity. It will bring us the near and ſure way to the greateſt of all earthly bleſſings, a contended mind.

Such will be the ſweet and delightful effects of depending upon God, and leaving it to him to furniſh our ſupplies as he ſees moſt convenient for us. Whoever can pray with the prophet, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me," may be fully aſſured, that his deſire ſhall be gratified, as it is perfectly agreeable to the will of God.

I conclude with reading to you our Saviour's exhortation on this ſubject: "Therefore, I ſay unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink; nor yet for your

body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

SERMON VII.

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY.

PROVERBS, xxx. 9.

Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

I PROCEED now to consider the arguments by which the prophet enforces his wise and well-conceived prayer. These, in connection with the two branches of the prayer, stand thus: "Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? And give me not poverty, lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." If Agur's prayer is conceived in the most modest and humble terms, the reasons with which he supports it are every way becoming a truly wise and good man. You see in them a prevailing concern for the honour and glory of God, and his own preservation in the paths of piety and virtue. You see in them a humble sense of his own weakness, and the danger of temptation; he, therefore, desires to

be placed in such a state of life, as will expose him to the fewest trials. An excellent disposition this, and highly worthy of our imitation. How happy would it be for us all, if a desire to please God, and preserve our integrity, lay always nearest our hearts, and had a constant and commanding influence on every step we took in our journey through life.

Neither riches nor poverty are bad in themselves. Neither of them is any recommendation, or hindrance to the favour of God, who is no respecter of persons; there are good and bad in all ranks. Men may be rich, and yet pious; or poor, yet strictly just and honest. It is, I confess, often done, yet it is highly criminal to look upon all that are rich in this world as profane; and it would be equally so to look upon all that are poor as destitute of integrity. Yet it is undeniable, that, from the corruption of the human heart, these two extremes do often become strong temptations to the particular sins mentioned in the text; which we shall now consider separately, in the order in which they lie in the passage before us.

"Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?"

As to the fact, that riches do often lead to profanity and contempt of God, experience and the state of the world prove it in a manner too plain to be denied. We not only see, that those who are born and educated from their infancy in the higher ranks of life, are most prone to neglect the duties of religion; but those who, from a low or mean condition, are remarkably raised in the course of

providence, do often change their temper with their ſtate, and ſhew the unhappy influence of riches in leading them to a forgetfulneſs of God. Are there not ſome, who were regularly in God's houſe when they but barely ſubſiſted, who have not time for it now, when they are buſy and wealthy? Are there not ſome families where the worſhip of God was conſtant and regular in early life, while they were undiſtinguiſhed, and now it is no more to be heard in their ſumptuous palaces and elegant apartments? Shall I ſay, that any worm of the earth is become too conſiderable to fall down before the omnipotent Jehovah!

I may add, as being of great importance in the preſent ſubject, that ſuch changes do often take place gradually and inſenſibly, very much contrary to men's own expectations; ſo that we really do not know ourſelves, nor can we determine, before trial, how far we would reſiſt or yield to the force of temptation. The prophet Eliſha foretold to Hazael, the cruelties he would be guilty of when raiſed to an higher ſtation; to which he replied with diſdain and abhorrence, "What! is thy ſervant a dog, that he ſhould do this great thing? And Eliſha anſwered, The Lord hath ſhewed me that thou ſhalt be king over Syria." The conduct of the children of Iſrael in their proſperity, is but an emblem of the general conduct of the children of men. "But Jeſhurun waxed fat, and kicked. Thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatneſs: Then he forſook God which made him, and lightly eſteemed the rock of his ſalvation."

What hath been said might be sufficient to shew the propriety of the prophet's prayer; for if such hath been often, or generally, the influence of worldly greatness upon other men, why should any be so confident as to presume it would be otherwise with themselves? But perhaps it may afford matter of useful instruction, to inquire a little further into the subject, to trace the causes of this effect, and shew how and why riches become an inducement to irreligion and profaneness, for this will best enable us to apply the remedy. When I speak of examining the causes of this effect, I confess that no reason can be given for it, but what reflects great dishonour upon human nature in its present state. Were we to judge of the matter by the dictates of sound reason, we should naturally expect to find it directly contrary. God is the author of every blessing which men possess, and his gifts should lead us to gratitude and acknowledgement. It seems natural to suppose, that those who are most highly favoured in the course of providence, should discover the greatest sense of obligation, and be ready to make every dutiful return. One would think, that though the poor should be impatient, surely the rich will be content and thankful. Is not this reasonable? Had any of you bestowed many favours upon others, would you not expect that their gratitude should bear some proportion to the number and value of benefits received? Had any of them been remarkably distinguished from the rest, would you not expect from them the most inviolable fidelity and attachment? Strange, that our conduct should be so directly opposite in the

returns we make for the goodneſs of our Maker! that thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed from others by the largeſt poſſeſſions, and the greateſt fulneſs of all temporal mercies, ſhould be the moſt prone to wickedneſs of all ſorts; but eſpecially that they ſhould be peculiarly inclined to forgetfulneſs and contempt of God! Yet ſo it is in truth. But however diſhonourable it is to human nature, let us ſearch into it a little, and perhaps we may diſcover the cauſe of impiety in perſons in affluent circumſtances, and the danger the prophet would avoid, by attending to the following obſervations.

1. An eaſy and affluent fortune affords the means, not only of pampering our bodies, but of gratifying all our luſts and appetites. They are as ſtrong probably in perſons of inferior ſtations, but Providence has rendered the gratification more difficult, and in ſome caſes impoſſible. Many work through neceſſity, who would be as idle and ſlothful as any, but for the fear of want. Theſe will be the firſt and readieſt to reproach the rich, and call them idle drones, who revel in that abundance for which they never toiled; and to put to their own credit that which is wholly owing to the reſtraints under which they are laid. Many are generally ſober, becauſe they cannot afford the charges of intemperance, who want nothing but the means to riot in the moſt brutal ſenſuality. But to perſons of great wealth, the objects of deſire are always placed in full view, and are evidently within their reach: ſo that the temptation has uncommon force, and few are able entirely to reſiſt it.

2. The indulgence of pleaſure inſenſibly induces a habit, and leads men to place their happineſs in ſuch enjoyments. Habit, you know, is very powerful, and while the habit acquires ſtrength, the power of reſiſtance is gradually weakened. Theſe gratifications conſume ſo much time, that there is little left to reflect upon God, and our relation to him. I reckon it none of the leaſt temptations to perſons in high rank, that not only their ſelf-indulgence, but the attendance and obſequiouſneſs of others, ſo engroſſes their attention, and waſtes their time, that they have few opportunities of calm and ſober reflection; or at leaſt can eaſily eſcape from it, and take refuge in company and amuſement. Add to this, that a great variety of ſenſible objects and enjoyments render the mind, not only leſs attentive to things of a ſpiritual nature, but indeed leſs able to underſtand them.

3. Obſerve further, that when the better part is thus neglected, and no care taken of the cultivation of the mind, every vice will ſpring and ſhoot up in the ſoul, as briars and thorns do upon uncultivated ground. Sin, my brethren, is natural to us; it is the produce of the ſoil; if it is not deſtroyed, it will not die; if it is but neglected, it will thrive. Now, whenever perſons fall under the power of vice, they begin firſt to excuſe, and then to vindicate it. Thoſe who are under the government of luſt, ſoon find it their intereſt that there was no ſuch thing as religion and virtue. Whatever we wiſh, we are eaſily led to believe to be true. Looſe and atheiſtical principles then find a ready admittance, and are ſwallowed down greedily. This is

a ſhort ſketch of the ſteps by which people in affluent and eaſy circumſtances are often led to deny God, and to ſay, "What is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him, and what profit ſhould we have if we pray unto him?" Looſe principles are, at firſt, more frequently the effect, than the cauſe of looſe practices; but when once they have taken deep root, and obtained full dominion in the heart, they have a dreadful and fatal influence on the devoted victim.

But, my brethren, I find a ſtrong inclination to make another remark, though perhaps it may be thought of too refined and abſtract a nature. It is, that the danger of affluence in leading to contempt of God, ariſes from the nature of all ſin as ſuch. The original and firſt ſin of man, was plainly affecting independence. They deſired and expected to be as gods, knowing good and evil. And ſtill ſin properly conſiſts in withdrawing our allegiance from, and throwing off our dependence upon God, and giving, as it were, that eſteem, love, and ſervice to ourſelves, in one ſhape or another, that is due only to him.

Now, obſerve, that affluence nouriſhes this miſtake, and ſuffering kills it. The more every thing abounds with us, the more our will is ſubmitted to, and our inclinations gratified on every ſubject; the more we look upon ourſelves as independent, and forget our obligations to God. Whereas, on the other hand, diſappointments and calamities open our blind eyes, and make us remember what we are. Was not the proud monarch of Babylon in-

ſpired with this deluſive ſenſe of independence, when he expreſſed himſelf thus: "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king ſpake and ſaid, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the houſe of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majeſty?" But mark the more powerful word of the King of kings: "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, ſaying, O king Nebuchadnezzar! to thee it is ſpoken, the kingdom is departed from thee." That this is the proper ſource of worldly greatneſs, may be ſeen in the temper ſuch perſons uſually acquire and ſettle in, which is pride, inſolence, and contempt of others. Nay, it appears ſtill more clearly in ſome few inſtances, in which the intoxication comes to its height, and the poor deluded mortal literally aſpires to be conſidered and treated as God. It may ſeem incredible, but we have the moſt authentic evidence that hiſtory can afford, that ſome men have demanded and received divine worſhip. This was the caſe, not only with Alexander the Great, who was really an illuſtrious prince, but with ſome of the later Roman emperors, who were the meaneſt and baſeſt of all men. No wonder, then, that proſperity makes men neglect God, when it prompts them to ſit down upon his throne, and rob him of the ſervice of his other ſubjects.

Before I proceed to the other part of the prophet's argument, ſuffer me to make a few remarks, for the improvement of what has been already ſaid, And,

1. See hence the great malignity and deceitfulneſs of ſin. It hardly appears more ſtrongly from any circumſtance, than that which has been the ſubject of this diſcourſe, viz. that the gifts of God, in the courſe of his providence, are ſo far from exciting our gratitude, in proportion to their number and value, that, on the contrary, thoſe who *receive most* are uſually *moſt profane*. They make his favours inſtruments of rebellion againſt him, and return contempt for his indulgence, and hatred for his love.

Let us not take occaſion from this to gratify our own envy, by particular or perſonal reproach againſt thoſe who are great, or have become rich amongſt ourſelves; but let us act a far wiſer and juſter part, and be humbled for the ſinfulneſs of our nature, and warned of the deceitfulneſs of ſin. We may feel the ſeeds of this diſpoſition in us all. You find the wiſe man charging a ſimilar ingratitude upon man in general. "Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil." And do you not obſerve every day, nay, has it not turned into a proverb, that we think light of our mercies, ſpiritual and temporal, when they are common and abundant? And what is the true and proper interpretation of this, but that the greater God's goodneſs is to us, commonly the leſs is our gratitude to him.

2. Let me beſeech you to make a wiſe improvement of the advantages you enjoy over one another:

Let them excite in you a holy emulation to teſtify your ſenſe of ſuperior bleſſings, by ſuperior piety and uſefulneſs. Do you excel others in any reſpect? Are you ſucceſsful in trade? Have you riſen to reputation? Are you exalted to offices of dignity? Are you endowed with capacity of mind? Can you remember the time when thoſe were your equals who are now your inferiors? Do not look with inſolence upon others, making odious and perhaps unjuſt compariſons. Do not ſwell in pride and ſelf-complacence, as if by your own power you had made yourſelves to differ, but rather look the other way, to God, who is the maker both of rich and poor, and pray that your thankfulneſs and duty to him may exceed that of the poor man, as much as his liberality to you exceeds what he has thought proper to beſtow upon him. This affords me an opportunity of relating a little piece of private hiſtory, that happened in Great Britain, and appears to me very worthy of remembrance, and very conducive to the ends of edification.

A gentleman of very conſiderable fortune, but a ſtranger to either perſonal or family religion, one evening took a ſolitary walk through a part of his own grounds. He happened to come near to a mean hut, where a poor man with a numerous family lived, who earned their bread by daily labour. He heard a voice pretty loud and continued. Not knowing what it was, curioſity prompted him to liſten. The man, who was piouſly diſpoſed, happened to be at prayer with his family. So ſoon as he could diſtinguiſh the words, he heard him

giving thanks with great affection to God, for the goodneſs of his providence, in giving them food to eat, and raiment to put on, and in ſupplying them with what was neceſſary and comfortable in the preſent life. He was immediately, no doubt by divine power, ſtruck with aſtoniſhment and confuſion, and ſaid to himſelf, Does this poor man, who has nothing but the meaneſt fare, and that purchaſed by ſevere labour, give thanks to God for his goodneſs to himſelf and family, and I, who enjoy eaſe and honour, and every thing that is grateful and deſirable, have hardly ever bent my knee, or made any acknowledgement to my Maker and Preſerver? It pleaſed God that this providential occurrence proved the mean of bringing him to a real and laſting ſenſe of God and religion.

Let all perſons in health, quiet, and plentiful circumſtances, learn from the preceding diſcourſe, what it is they ought clearly to guard againſt. Pride, ſecurity, forgetfulneſs of God, are peculiarly incident to that ſtate. "Lo this," ſaith the Lord to Jeruſalem, "was the iniquity of thy ſiſter Sodom, pride, fulneſs of bread, and abundance of idleneſs was in her, and in her daughters; neither did ſhe ſtrengthen the hand of the poor and needy." A ſerious reflection on the obligation ſuch lie under to God for what they have received in their continued dependence upon him, and the inſtability of all earthly things, would ſave them from the hurtful influence of worldly proſperity. To enforce this, I ſhall only read the apoſtolic charge to Timothy: "Charge them who are rich in this world,

that they be not high minded, nor truſt in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate; laying up in ſtore for themſelves a good foundation againſt the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

SERMON VIII.

THE DANGER OF ADVERSITY.

PROVERBS, XXX. 9.

Lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

I PROCEED now to consider the argument by which the prophet urges the *second* branch of his request, which, in connection, runs thus: "Give me not poverty, lest I be poor, and steal." Having not only explained the general principle that runs through the whole of this subject, but also very particularly pointed out the dangers attending an opulent and wealthy state, I shall endeavour to do the same thing with respect to a state of poverty and straitness. While I attempt this, I am sincerely sorry that there is so much propriety in the subject; and that it is so well suited to the circumstances of the inhabitants of this place. You see the prophet considers the great and general temptation to which the poor are exposed, to be dishonest, by using fraudulent means of relieving their wants, or

bettering their condition. You see also, he considers this temptation in its progress, not only inclining them to act unjustly, but sometimes proceeding to the terrible degree of concealing or supporting the fraud by falsehood, and perhaps at last by perjury or false swearing; "lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

Let us, *first*, consider a little the matter of fact, as it appears in experience, and then a few of its principal causes.

As to *first* of these, shall I be afraid to affirm, that extreme poverty often inclines persons to dishonesty and fraud? Will it be thought harsh and severe to those already sufficiently depressed? As I would not seem to stand in this place, and flatter the pride of the greatest and most eminent of my fellow-sinners, so neither will I dissemble the truth from a false compassion for the poor. This would indeed be doing them the greatest possible injury; it would be treating them, from mistaken tenderness, as the rich are often treated from the fear or partiality of those who are about them; fostering their self-deceit, and not suffering them to hear the most salutary truths, because they are not pleasing to the flesh.

It is undoubtedly matter of experience, that great poverty makes many take unjust and unwarrantable methods of procuring relief. Not only so, but they seem often disposed to justify and defend them, as if they had a title to rectify the mistakes of Providence, in the distribution of worldly possessions. This, in the event, receives great encouragement from some who seem to have imbibed

a general falſe principle, and act upon it, both in their own conduct, and in their judgement of others. In the diviſion of controverſy, or dividing diſputed property, when one party is, or is ſuppoſed to be rich, and in eaſy circumſtances, and the other poor, and in a mean condition, they think, that inſtead of acting according to ſtrict juſtice, the advantage ſhould always be made to fall to the poorer ſide. This conduct is conſidered by ſome, not only as lawful, but as laudable. It is, however, a falſe principle, and is condemned in ſcripture, which ſays, "Neither ſhalt thou countenance a poor man in his cauſe." It may be thought, perhaps, that the other is the more common and dangerous partiality, and probably it is ſo; yet this alſo is blameworthy; and when followed out, as I am afraid it too often is, muſt involve numbers unawares in the guilt of ſtealing; for when they have once laid down this rule, that the poor have ſome claim upon the rich, they are ready to apply it to their own caſe, and extend it very far. But in all matters of property, or right and wrong, whether a perſon is rich or poor, ought to be utterly out of the queſtion; the only thing to be conſidered is, what is juſt and lawful. The rich are indeed, in point of conſcience, bound to aſſiſt the poor; but this muſt be their own act; no perſon can take the ſmalleſt part of their property without their conſent, but he is guilty of an act of injuſtice, and violation of the law of God. No perſon has a right to make them generous and charitable againſt their wills, or to exerciſe their own generoſity and charity at their expence. This muſt be left to the

Supreme Judge at the laſt day, who will ſay to them, "I was a ſtranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not." But what will give us the moſt diſtinct view of the influence of poverty, as a temptation, is the too frequent conduct of thoſe who are reduced from what was once their ſtate, to poverty or debt, by misfortunes or extravagance, or miſmanagement of their affairs. The temptation of poverty is not by far ſo great to thoſe in the meaneſt ranks of life, whoſe income, though ſmall, is not very diſproportionate to what hath always been their condition, as to thoſe who are reduced from a higher to a lower ſtate. The few, who in ſuch a ſituation preſerve their integrity inviolated, and their ſincerity of ſpeech unſuſpected, deſerve the higheſt honour. Nay, I am perſuaded, that, bad as the world is, every perſon in reduced circumſtances, would meet with compaſſion and aſſiſtance, if all about him were ſenſible that he had neither loſt his ſubſtance by neglect, nor waſted it by riot, nor concealed it by fraud. But though we cannot help aſcribing ſome meaſure of what is laid to the charge of perſons in this unhappy ſtate, to the rage and reſentment of thoſe who have ſuffered by them; yet, alas! there is too great reaſon to affirm, that they are too often guilty of prevarication and fraud, the ſins mentioned in the text.

I will dwell no longer upon the fact, but will conſider a little the reaſons of it, which will directly ſerve to promote the deſign of this diſcourſe, by exciting men to concern and ſolicitude, as well

as pointing out the proper means of avoiding the temptation. The general reaſon of this, to be ſure, is obvious to every body, that perſons in poverty, being ſtrongly ſolicited by the appetites common to all men, and not having of their own wherewith to gratify their deſires, are tempted to lay hold of the property of others. They grudge to ſee that others have the enjoyments from which they are debarred; and ſince they cannot have them in a lawful, make bold to ſeize them in an unlawful way. But this I do not inſiſt on, that I may mention one or two particular reaſons, which will ſuggeſt ſuitable exhortations to duty.

1. The *firſt* I ſhall mention is ignorance. This is peculiarly applicable to thoſe in the loweſt ranks of life. Through poverty they are not ſo well inſtructed as they ought to be, in the principles of religion, and the great rules of duty. An ignorant ſtate is almoſt always a ſtate of ſecurity. Their conſciences are leſs tender, and they are leſs ſenſible of the great evil of prevarication and fraud. I am obliged, in fidelity, to ſay, that in the private inſpection of my charge, though I have found ſome inſtances both of poverty and ſickneſs borne with the moſt pious reſignation, there are alſo ſome whoſe condition might move the hardeſt heart, living in the moſt ſordid poverty, groſsly ignorant, and at the ſame time ſo diſpirited, ſo ſlothful, or ſo proud, that they will do little to obtain knowledge for themſelves, or communicate it to their children. Many will not attend upon the public means of inſtruction, becauſe they cannot appear

in ſuch a decent garb as they could wiſh; and for the ſame reaſon they keep their children from them, till they contract ſuch habits of idleneſs and vice, that they come out into the world without principle, obſtinate and untractable. Is not the duty here very plain? All ſuch ſhould exert themſelves to obtain the knowledge of the things which belong to their peace. They ſhould neither be unwilling nor aſhamed to make application for ſupply; and even the coarſeſt raiment ſhould not hinder them from appearing in the houſe of God. Thus they will find acceptance with him, if they worſhip him in the beauty of holineſs, preferable to thoſe who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and their hearts are after their covetouſneſs.

2. Another great reaſon why poverty becomes a temptation to fraud is, that they are introduced to it inſenſibly, and led on by degrees. The ſin ſteals on them by little and little. People involved in their circumſtances, to get rid of importunity and ſolicitation, make promiſes, more of what they hope or wiſh, than of what they are able to do. Neceſſity ſerves as an excuſe for their failing to their own minds, and thus they are gradually brought into a breach of ſincerity, and proceed from lower to higher degrees of falſehood. Little arts of evaſion are firſt made uſe of, and doubtful practices are entered upon. One ſin ſeems neceſſary to ſtrengthen or conceal another, till at laſt the groſſeſt fraud, and ſometimes perjury itſelf, cloſes the unhappy ſcene. I have read an excellent obſervation, that there is hardly ſuch a thing as a ſingle ſin; they

are always to be found in cluſters. I am ſure, this holds in a particular manner as to ſins of injuſtice. They are ſo interwoven and connected together, that you cannot receive any one without being obliged to admit the reſt. This is one great branch of the deceitfulneſs of ſin in general; with a view to which the apoſtle ſays, "But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, leſt any of you be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin."

3. I only mention one other reaſon of poverty being a temptation to fraud, viz. that in time it deſtroys the ſenſe of ſhame. I am not ignorant, that a ſenſe of ſhame, which is nothing elſe but a fear of the cenſure of others, neither is nor ought to be the main principle of a good man's actions. But as there is no other principle at all in many, ſo it is a good aſſiſtant, and corroborative, when juſtly directed; but now, through the corrupt maxims of the world, poverty is ſo much the object of contempt; and thoſe who are in this ſtate meet every day with ſo many marks of neglect from all, that, before their condition is known, they will do almoſt any thing to conceal it, and after it is known, they become in time ſo deſtitute of ſhame, that they are under no further reſtraint.

From this particular branch of the ſubject, let me put you in mind,

1. What reaſon many have to be thankful to the God of life, who hath given them their daily proviſion, if not in all the abundance of immenſe riches, yet in fulneſs and ſufficiency. An humble, thank-

ful diſpoſition is not only your duty, in return for the divine bounty, but is itſelf the richeſt and ſweeteſt ingredient in all temporal mercies. It is that indeed which makes them mercies. Envious perſons do not taſte what they have, their evil eye being fixed on what they cannot obtain. Things in this reſpect are juſt what they ſeem to be. Our comforts are as we are enabled to reliſh them. The ſame poſſeſſions which are deſpiſed by the impatient or ambitious, are a treaſure and abundance to the humble and grateful.

2. If poverty is a temptation, it ought to be an argument to all to avoid it, or ſeek deliverance from it by lawful means. Apply yourſelves with ſteadineſs and perſeverance to the duties of your calling, that you may provide things honeſt in the ſight of all men. It is a duty of the law and of the goſpel; and it hath this promiſe, in general, annexed to it, that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Read, I beſeech you, that vaſt treaſure of uſeful inſtruction, the book of Proverbs; where you will meet with many excellent counſels and wiſe obſervations upon this ſubject. Of theſe I ſhall mention, at preſent, but two paſſages, ſelected both for the ſoundneſs of the inſtruction, and the beauty of the illuſtration: "Go to the ant, thou ſluggard, conſider her ways, and be wiſe; which having no guide, overſeer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the ſummer, and gathereth her food in the harveſt. How long wilt thou ſleep, O ſluggard! When wilt thou ariſe out of thy ſleep? So ſhall thy poverty come as one that travelleth,

and thy want as an armed man." And again, "I went by the field of the ſlothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of underſtanding; and, lo, it it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the ſtone-wall thereof was broken down."

3. Are any of you poor and reduced in your circumſtances? ſet a double watch upon your conduct, and earneſtly pray that God may preſerve you from fraud and diſingenuity of every kind. Rather ſuffer yourſelves to be ſtripped of every thing, and apply to the charity of others, which is not ſinful, and ought not to be ſhameful, than take any diſhoneſt methods of bettering your ſtate. O melancholy thought, that many, when they become deſperate in their circumſtances, become alſo deſperate in their courſes, and drown the reflection of their conſciences in ſlothfulneſs and ſenſuality! Sincerity, integrity, patience, and ſobriety in a ruined fortune, are doubly eminent; at leaſt, whatever they may be in the ſight of the world, they are honourable and precious in the ſight of God, and of all good men.

Before concluding, ſuffer me to make one or two reflections on the ſubject in general; the ſeveral parts of which I have now explained. And,

1. On what hath been ſaid on this ſubject, I would graft this important leſſon, that you ſhould not only ſtudy to preſerve yourſelves from ſin, but from all ſuch circumſtances of temptation as are dangerous to human conſtancy. This was the very ground of the prayer of the prophet in the text, and

is the ſubſtance of the reaſons he aſſigns for his requeſt. We are taught the ſame thing in the ſtrongeſt manner, by the ſeveral inſtances of human frailty, and the folly of preſumptuous confidence, recorded in ſcripture. "Now all theſe things happened unto them for enſamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him who thinketh he ſtandeth take heed leſt he fall." We are alſo taught the ſame thing by him who knew what was in man, as he has given us directions in the form of prayer which he taught his diſciples, to ſay, Lord, "lead us not into temptation"

Are you really unwilling to do evil? you will be concerned to keep yourſelves out of the way of every ſolicitation to it. This is conſtantly the effect of judicious and ſolid piety; and thoſe who act otherwiſe ſhew that they either have no real goodneſs, or that they are very weak Chriſtians, and little acquainted either with themſelves, or this preſent evil world.

2. You may learn how neceſſary it is that you ſhould look for the divine aſſiſtance and direction, to avoid the temptation of every ſtate of life. We are truly of ourſelves unequal to the trials with which we are ſurrounded. Not that there is any thing unjuſt or oppreſſive in the meaſures of providence; but becauſe it ſeems good to our Maker, to oblige us to a conſtant dependence upon himſelf and his promiſed help. "But God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it."

The leaſt temptation may prove too hard for us, if we neglect to apply for ſupreme aid; but in divine ſtrength, we may bid defiance to the moſt formidable oppoſition. This temper is well exemplified and deſcribed by the apoſtle Paul to the Corinthians: "And he ſaid unto me, My grace is ſufficient for thee, for my ſtrength is made perfect in weakneſs. Moſt gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Chriſt may reſt upon me. Therefore, I take pleaſure in infirmities, in reproaches, in neceſſities, in perſecution, in diſtreſſes, for Chriſt's ſake; for when I am weak, then am I ſtrong."

3. From what hath been ſaid, you may ſee what an inſeparable connection there is between true religion and your employments and ſtate in this preſent world. They have a mutual, ſtrong, and conſtant influence upon one another. It is fatal, though a common error, to ſeparate them; entirely to confine religion to the times and places of immediate worſhip, and ſuppoſe that it hath nothing to do with the maxims of trade and commerce, or other worldly callings. On the contrary, your impreſſions of things ſpiritual and eternal, will direct and regulate your views as to the preſent life; and your ſucceſs or misfortunes in worldly ſchemes, will have a certain and viſible effect upon your Chriſtian converſation, and the ſtate of your ſouls. Therefore, let them never be ſeparated in your own views, and let them ſtill be kept in their proper order and ſubordination. Though the light and trivial uſe, not only of the name of God, but of ſcripture-

language, is both ſinful and dangerous; and though a forward oſtentatious piety may ſometimes look ſuſpicious, yet it were to be wiſhed we had more of a grave and habitual acknowledgement of God in all our ways. This was the language of the patriarchs of old. In one of the former diſcourſes upon this ſubject, I took notice of Jacob's prayer, when he ſet out for Padan-aram. See, after the increaſe of his family, how he expreſſes himſelf in anſwer to his brother Eſau: "And he lift up his eyes and ſaw the women and children, and ſaid, Who are theſe with thee? And he ſaid, The children which God hath graciouſly given thy ſervant." See alſo the apoſtolic direction for the manner of projecting our future purpoſes: "Go to now, ye that ſay, To-day, or to-morrow, we will go into ſuch a city, and continue there a year, and buy and ſell, and get gain."

In the *laſt* place, let me beſeech, in the tendereſt manner, every one of you, rich and poor, to remember an approaching eternity. It will not be long till the honourable and deſpiſed, the wealthy and the needy, the maſter and the ſervant, ſhall lie down in the duſt. Lay hold of that covenant of peace which is ordered in all things, and ſure. Hear a great and conſtant truth: "What is a man profited, though he ſhould gain the whole world and loſe his own ſoul, or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?" How many a Lazarus is now in Abraham's boſom! and how many a rich man, that once lived delicately on earth, is at this moment tormented in hell-fire! The goſpel

of peace is now preached in your ears. Believe in the name of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and ye ſhall be ſaved. I cannot promiſe that you ſhall be rich, but all things neceſſary are aſſured to you by the divine promiſe; food and raiment, ſupport under trials, ſtrength for duty, and in the world to come everlaſting reſt.

SERMON IX.

ON THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Preached in the Old Preſbyterian Church in New York, to a very numerous audience, on the evening of the ſecond Sabbath in May, 1789.

MARK, x. 13, 14, 15, 16.

And they brought young children unto him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

THERE are few things in which people of reflection in general, and eſpecially thoſe who fear God, are more agreed, than the importance of the riſing generation; or, which is the true meaning of that expreſſion, the importance of the inſtruction and government of youth.

This is a ſubject of great extent, and may alſo be taken up in a great variety of lights. I am one of thoſe who think that it may, as well as many others, be, with much advantage, conſidered doctrinally; and that a clear view of divine truth upon every ſubject, will have the moſt powerful and happy influence, not only in directing our ſentiments, but in governing our practice.

There is much to be ſeen of the proper glory of the Redeemer in this paſſage of ſcripture: His uſefulneſs, his attention to improve every ſeemingly accidental occurrence for the purpoſe of inſtruction, and his amiable condeſcenſion to all who humbly applied to him, and tender feeling for their wants and weakneſſes. It appears from this paſſage, that the inhabitants about Jordan, where he then was, not only brought their ſick to be healed, as they did in moſt other places, but brought young children, "that he ſhould touch them." In Luke they are called infants; and in the latter end of the paſſage now read, it is ſaid, he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and bleſſed them; ſo that it is probable they were all of them of very early age, and ſome of them, perhaps, literally what we call infants, who could not yet ſpeak or walk. I ſee not the leaſt foundation for what ſome commentators imagine, that they might labour under ſome diſorder, from which the parents ſuppoſed he would cure them: If this had been the intention, the diſciples would not, probably, have found any fault with it. The probability is, that the parents or relations of the children brought them, expecting that he would lay his hands on

them, authoritatively bleſs them, and pray for them; from which they believed important benefits might be derived to them. The diſciples, we are told, "rebuked thoſe that brought them," ſuppoſing, doubtleſs, that it was an impertinent and unneceſſary interruption of their Maſter, and that the children could receive no benefit at that early time of life; and who knows but, like the human wiſdom of later times, they might think the attempt ſuperſtitious as well as unneceſſary? However, our Lord was of a different opinion, and ſaid, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of ſuch is the kindom of God."

Now, the ſingle ſubject of this diſcourſe ſhall be to inquire, What is the import of this declaration? and, What we may underſtand our Saviour as affirming, when he ſays of young children or infants, "of ſuch is the kingdom of God?" After this, I will give ſuch advices as the truths that may be eſtabliſhed ſhall ſuggeſt, and as they ſeem to me moſt proper to enforce.

LET us, then, conſider what we may underſtand our Saviour as affirming, when he ſays of young children or infants, "of ſuch is the kingdom of God."

And, in the *first* place, we may underſtand by it, That children may be taken within the bond of God's covenant; become members of the viſible church, and in conſequence be *relatively* holy. I do not found the lawfulneſs of infant-baptiſm on this paſſage alone, and mean to enter into no controverſy on the ſubject at this time; but, as it is

clearly eſtabliſhed in other paſſages, it may well be underſtood here. At any rate, ſo far as I have affirmed is undoubtedly certain, that they *may be* admitted within the bond of God's covenant. We know, that under the Old Teſtament, they received the ſign of circumciſion, which in the New Teſtament is ſaid to be "a ſeal of the righteouſneſs that is of faith," (Rom. iv. 11). Many benefits may ariſe from this. As in the natural conſtitution of man, many advantages and diſadvantages are derived from parents upon the offspring, ſo, in the moral conſtitution of divine grace, many bleſſings, ſpiritual and temporal, may be inherited from pious parents. Children are the ſubjects of prayer; and, of conſequence, within reach of the promiſe. The believer may juſtly hope for his ſeed dying in infancy; and in after life many eventual providential mercies may be expected from that God "who ſheweth mercy to thouſands of generations of them that love him."

It was uſual in the moſt ancient times, for aged or holy perſons to bleſs children formally. I do not recollect in ancient hiſtory, a more beautiful, or more tender ſcene, than that we have recorded, Gen. xlviii. 15. of the patriarch Jacob's bleſſing his grandchildren, the ſons of Joſeph, when he was about to die: "And he bleſſed Joſeph, and ſaid, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Iſaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life-long to this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bleſs the lads; and let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Iſaac: And let them grow into a

multitude in the midſt of the earth." We are told by an ancient writer of the Chriſtian church, that Ignatius, afterwards biſhop of Antioch, was one of thoſe children thus brought to Chriſt for his bleſſing; and there is no reaſon, that I know of, to oppoſe the tradition: For ſuppoſing him to have been an infant, or even from 2 to 5 years of age, it would make him only between 70 and 80 at the time of his martyrdom, in the year 108 from the birth of Chriſt.

2. The declaration, "Of ſuch is the kingdom of God," may be underſtood to imply, that children may, even in infancy, be the ſubjects of regenerating grace, and thereby become *really* holy. This is plain from the nature of the thing; for if they can carry the corrupt impreſſion of Adam's nature in their infant ſtate, there can be no doubt but they may be renewed after the image of him that created them. Almighty power can eaſily have acceſs to them, and can, in anſwer to prayers, as well as endeavours, form them for their Maker's ſervice. See what the prophet Iſaiah ſays, ch. xxviii. 9. "Whom ſhall we teach knowledge? and whom ſhall we make to underſtand doctrine? Thoſe that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breaſts." Samuel was a child of prayer, and dedicated to God from his infant years, and it is ſaid of him, 1 Sam. ii. 26. "And the child Samuel grew, and was in favour both with the Lord, and alſo with men." It is an expreſſion frequently to be found in pious writers, and among them that are far from denying the univerſal corruption of human nature, that ſome may be ſaid to be ſanctified from

the womb, that is, that the time of their renovation may be beyond the reach both of underſtanding and memory; and this being certainly poſſible, may juſtly be conſidered as the object of deſire and the ſubject of prayer. Few, perhaps, have failed to obſerve, that ſome children diſcover, upon the firſt dawn of reaſon, an amiable and tractable diſpoſition, and drink in ſpiritual inſtruction with deſire and delight; while others diſcover a frowardneſs and repugnance, that is with much difficulty, if at all, and ſometimes never, overcome.

3. I think this declaration implies, that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit, even by outward means, than is generally ſuppoſed. No doubt the reaſon of the conduct of the diſciples was, that they ſuppoſed the children could receive no benefit. In this, from our Lord's anſwer, it is probable he thought them miſtaken. I will not enlarge on ſome refined remarks of perſons as diſtinguiſhed for learning as piety; ſome of whom have ſuppoſed, that they are capable of receiving impreſſions of deſire and averſion, and even of moral temper, particularly of love or hatred, in the firſt year of their lives. I muſt, however, mention a remark of the juſtly celebrated M. Fenelon, archbiſhop of Cambray, becauſe the fact on which it is founded is undeniable, and the deduction from it important. He ſays, that 'before they are thought capable of receiving any inſtruction, or the leaſt pains are taken with them, they learn a language. Many children at four years of age can ſpeak their mother-tongue, though not with the ſame accuracy or grammatical preciſion, yet with greater readineſs

and fulneſs than moſt ſcholars do a foreign language after the ſtudy of a whole life.' If I were to enlarge upon this, I might ſay, they not only diſcover their intellectual powers by connecting the idea with the ſign, but acquire many ſentiments of good and evil, right and wrong, in that early period of their life. Such is the attention of children, that they often ſeem to know their parents' tempers ſooner and better than they know their's, and to avail themſelves of that knowledge to obtain their deſires.

To apply this to our preſent ſubject, or rather the occaſion of it, allow me to obſerve, that the circumſtances of ſolemn tranſactions are often deeply engraven upon very young minds. It is not impoſſible that ſome of thoſe young children might recollect and be affected with the majeſty and condeſcenſion of Jeſus of Nazareth, and the impreſſion be attended with happy fruits. At any rate, as no doubt the parents would often relate the tranſaction to their children, this would be a kind of ſecondary memory, and have the ſame effect upon their ſentiments and conduct.

4. This declaration implies, that the earlieſt, in general, is the fitteſt and beſt time for inſtruction. This part of the ſubject has been treated at full length by many writers in every age, I therefore ſhall ſay the leſs upon it. Only obſerve, that the importance of every inſtruction is written upon the whole ſyſtem of nature, and repeated in every page of the hiſtory of providence. You may bend a young twig, and make it receive almoſt any form: but that which has attained to maturity, and taken

its ply, you will never bring into any other ſhape than that which it naturally bears. In the ſame manner thoſe habits which men contract in early life, and are ſtrengthened by time, it is next to impoſſible to change. Far be it from me to ſay any thing in oppoſition to the infinite power and abſolute ſovereignty of God; but let us alſo beware of conſidering theſe as oppoſed to the natural courſe of things, or the uſe and efficacy of means. We have many warnings upon this ſubject in ſcripture, where the recovery of an habitual and hardened ſinner is likened to a natural impoſſibility, Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo do good that are accuſtomed to do evil." God will reſerve to himſelf his own abſolute ſovereignty, but it is at every ſinner's own peril if he preſume upon it, and abuſe it.

5. This declaration of our Saviour, "Of ſuch is the kingdom of God," may imply, that, in fact, the real diſciples of Chriſt chiefly conſiſt of thoſe who are called in their earlier years. The viſible church of Chriſt is a numerous and mixed ſociety; but his myſtical body, conſiſting of real believers, I think we are warranted from this paſſage of ſcripture and others, as well as the analogy of faith, and the reaſon and nature of things, to ſuppoſe, conſiſts for the moſt part of thoſe who are called in infancy and youth. This is an important truth, and deeply fraught with inſtruction to all, of every rank. There are ſome called after a courſe of oppoſition to God, but they are few in compariſon; therefore the apoſtle Paul ſtyles himſelf, "one born out of

due time." Perhaps experience and a deliberate view of the ſtate of the world is ſufficient to prove this aſſertion. The inſtances of converſion in advanced life, are very rare: and when it ſeems to happen, it is perhaps moſt commonly the reſurrection of thoſe ſeeds which were ſown in infancy, but had been long ſtifled by the violence of youthful paſſions, or the purſuits of ambition and the hurry of an active life. I have known ſeveral inſtances of the inſtructions, long neglected, of deceaſed parents, at laſt riſing up, aſſerting their authority, and producing the deepeſt penitence and real reformation. But my experiences furniſh me with no example of one brought up in ignorance and ſecurity, after a long courſe of profaneneſs, turning, at the cloſe of life, to the ſervice of the living God. The moſt common caſe is, that the deep ſleep continues to the laſt, and, as the ſaying is, they die as they live; though in ſome inſtances when the ſins have been of the groſſeſt kind, conſcience awakens at their going off the ſtage, and they ſeem, as it were, to begin the torments of hell with the terror of deſpair.

You will find in ſome practical writers an opinion or ſentiment, that ſeems not ill-founded, to the following purpoſe: 'Some are called at the eleventh hour, that none may deſpair;' and there are few, that none may preſume. Others make a diſtinction, not without ground, as it ſeems founded upon the wiſdom and equity of the divine government, That when the goſpel comes to a people that had long ſitten in darkneſs, there may be numerous converts of all ages; but when the goſpel has been

long preached in plenty and purity, and ordinances regularly adminiſtered, few but thoſe who are called in early life are ever called at all. A very judicious and pious writer, Mr Richard Baxter, is of opinion, that in a regular ſtate of the church, and a tolerable meaſure of faithfulneſs and purity in its officers, family inſtruction and government are the uſual means of converſion, public ordinances of edification. This ſeems agreeable to the language of ſcripture; for we are told, that God hath ſet in the church, apoſtles, prophets, evangeliſts, paſtors, and teachers, (not for converting ſinners, but) "for perfecting of the ſaints for the work of the miniſtry, and the edifying of the body of Chriſt." It ſeems to add further weight to this, that moſt of thoſe who are recorded in ſcripture as eminent for piety, were called in early life; and we know not but it may have been the caſe with others, though not particularly mentioned. Thoſe I have in view are, Abraham, Moſes, Samuel, David, Solomon, Joſiah, Daniel, and the three Children, in the Old Teſtament; and in the New, John Baptiſt, and John the beloved diſciple, of whom I may juſt obſerve, that no reaſon has ever been given for the Saviour's diſtinguiſhing him by particular affection, but that he was the youngeſt of the twelve.

6. In the *laſt* place, This declaration implies, that the comparative innocence of children is a leſſon to us, and an emblem of the temper and carriage of Chriſt's real diſciples. This inſtruction we are not left to infer for ourſelves. Our Lord has made the remark in the paſſage where the text lies, "Who-

ſoever ſhall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, ſhall not enter therein." This is directly levelled againſt the pride of ſelf-ſufficiency, and every rough and boiſterous paſſion. It is remarkable that the very ſame image is made uſe of in ſeveral paſſages of ſcripture. Thus, Matth. xviii. 1, 2, 3, 4, "At the ſame time the diſciples came unto Jeſus, ſaying, Who is the greateſt in the kingdom of heaven? And Jeſus called a little child unto him, and ſet him in the midſt of them, and ſaid, Verily I ſay unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye ſhall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoſoever, therefore, ſhall humble himſelf as this little child, the ſame is greateſt in the kingdom of heaven." So alſo the apoſtle Paul, 1 Cor. xiv. 20. "Brethren, be not children in underſtanding: howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in underſtanding be men." And further, 1 Peter, ii. 1. 2. "Wherefore, laying aſide all malice, and all guile, and hypocriſies, and envies, and evil ſpeakings, as newborn babes deſire the ſincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The graces of the ſpiritual life recommended to us by this beautiful image, are humility, gentleneſs, teachableneſs, ſincerity, and eaſineſs to be reconciled: all which are remarkable in young perſons, and are frequently loſt or vitiated by growing years.

I COME now to make a practical improvement of the ſubject, which ſhall be confined to pointing out the duties ſuggeſted by the foregoing truths,

as they are ſeverally incumbent on, 1*st*, Parents; 2*d*, Children; 3*d*, Every hearer of the goſpel.

1. Let us conſider the duties incumbent on parents. Is it ſo, that of children or infants the Redeemer ſaid, "of ſuch is the kingdom of God?"

Then parents ſhould be, (1.), thankful. Thankfulneſs is a happy frame of ſpirit in itſelf, and powerfully reconciles the mind to difficult, and animates it to important duties. Be thankful, then, for the honour that is done you, for the truſt that is repoſed in you, and for the encouraging promiſe of God to aſſiſt and accept of you in the diſcharge of it: "Children are the gift of God; and the fruit of the womb is his reward." I cannot eaſily figure to myſelf any greater earthly bleſſing than to have children to be the objects of your care and diligence while you live, and to inherit your name and ſubſtance, when you yourſelves muſt, in the courſe of nature, go off the ſtage. And is it a little honour to be entruſted with the care of theſe rational creatures of God, born to immortality, and whoſe preſent peace and future welfare depend ſo much on your conduct? Are you not called to prepare members for the church of Chriſt? "for of ſuch is his kingdom;" and however important the miniſtry of the goſpel is, (which I ſhould be the laſt to detract from), you may know, that it is out of a miniſter's power to ſpeak to the underſtanding of thoſe who are not prepared by previous inſtruction. But, above all, how thankful ſhould you be for the encouragement given you to bring your children to the Saviour, and for the promiſe of his bleſſing! "He

took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and bleſſed them." Fathers! Mothers! What ground of praiſe to the condeſcending Saviour!

(2.) Be early and diligent in inſtruction. This is the great and ſubſtantial evidence you are called to give of your thankfulneſs for the mercy. You have heard, that children are much more early capable of receiving benefit by outward means than is commonly ſuppoſed: Let not, therefore, 'the devil and the world be too far beforehand with you, in poſſeſſing their fancy, engaging their affections, and miſleading their judgement. Is it a fable, or do I ſpeak truth, when I ſay, many children learn to ſwear before they learn to pray? It is indeed affecting to a ſerious mind, to hear children liſping out ill-pronounced oaths, or ſcurrilous and ſcolding abuſe, or even impurities which they do not underſtand; ſo that the firſt ſentiments they form, and the firſt words they utter, are thoſe of impiety, malice, or obſcenity. Nay, I have ſeen children in their mother's arms actually taught to ſcold, by uttering angry ſounds, before they could ſpeak one word with diſtinctneſs. It is wholly impoſſible for me here to introduce a ſyſtem of directions as to the method of early inſtruction; this muſt be learned elſewhere, and at another time; but I mean to impreſs your minds with a ſenſe of the importance and neceſſity of the duty, and, I will add, the *efficacy* of it. Remember the connection between the duty and the promiſe: "Train up a child in the way he ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I knew a pious and judicious miniſter, who affirmed, that we did

not give credit to that part of God's word, if we did not believe the certainty of the promise, as well as the obligation of the duty; he was of opinion, that every parent, when he seemed to fail, should conclude that he himself had been undutiful, and not that God had been unfaithful.

(3.) Be circumspect and edifying in your example. All the arguments that press the former exhortation, apply with the same, perhaps I may say with double force, to this. Example is itself the most powerful and successful instruction; and example is necessary to give meaning and influence to all other instruction. This is one of the oldest maxims upon the subject of education. The Roman satyrist says, *Nil dictu visuve fœdum hæc limina tangat intra quæ puer est.* 'Let nothing base be seen or heard within these walls in which a child is.'—And if children naturally form their sentiments, habits, and manners, by imitation of others in general, how much more powerful must be the example of parents, who are every hour in their sight, whom nature teaches them, and whom duty obliges them to love, and when it comes recommended by the continual intercourse, and the endearing services that flow from that intimate relation.

(4.) *Lastly*, Parents are taught here perseverance and importunity in prayer. This, indeed, is an important thing upon every subject of our requests to God. Our Saviour spoke a parable on purpose to teach men, that they should pray always, and not faint, Luke, xviii. 1. And if we are called to believe, that "if we ask any thing agreeable to his will,

he heareth us," what more agreeable to his will than frequent and importunate prayer for the temporal and ſpiritual happineſs of children? What a ſupport this to the faith of prayer! You ought, at the ſame time, to remember that, as the prophet Jeremiah ſays, "it is good for a man to hope, and quietly to wait for the ſalvation of God." The anſwer of prayer may come at a much greater diſtance than we are apt to look for it. There is a remarkable anecdote handed down to us, reſpecting the famous St Auguſtine. He was the ſon of an eminently pious woman, whoſe name was Monica, yet he was in his youth very looſe and diſorderly. One of his fellow-citizens, it is ſaid, ſeeing him paſs along the ſtreet, reflected upon him with great ſeverity, as a diſgrace to ſociety; but another made anſwer, that he was not without hopes of him after all, for he thought it next to impoſſible that the ſon of ſo many prayers ſhould periſh. And we know, that in fact he became in due time one of the moſt eminent champions for evangelical truth. There is not the leaſt doubt, that many prayers, and eſpecially of this kind, may have their anſwer and accompliſhment after the believer that offered them has been many years ſleeping in the duſt.

2. The truths above illuſtrated, ſuggeſt important advices to children, that is, to ſuch young perſons as are able to underſtand and apply them.

(1.) Preſerve a tenderneſs of heart, and be thankful that you are not yet hardened by habitual guilt, nor ſentenced to perpetual barrenneſs, by the judgement of a righteous God. Eſteem, embrace, improve the precious but flying ſeaſon. Hearken to

the inſtructions of parents; the admonitions of paſtors, the leſſons of providence, and the dictates of God's Holy Spirit ſpeaking by the conſcience. Think of the amiableneſs of early piety in the ſight of men, and its acceptableneſs in the ſight of God: "I love them that love me," ſays he by his prophet; "and they that ſeek me early ſhall find me."

(2.) Be not ſatisfied with, or truſt in outward privileges. If you are the children of pious parents, who have lived near to God, if you have been favoured with early inſtruction, unleſs theſe advantages are improved, they will not plead for, but againſt you, at the great day. This is the dictate both of ſcripture and reaſon, "To whomſoever much is given, of them much will be required." There is a common ſaying, that is neither agreeable to truth nor experience, and yet ſometimes obtains belief in a blinded world, that the children of good people are as bad as any: as if early education, which is of ſo much influence in learning every thing elſe, ſhould have no effect in religion. On the contrary, where do we expect to find pious youth, but in pious families, or ſober and induſtrious youth, but in ſober and induſtrious families? I ſhould call that man prudent in the conduct of life, who, in the choice of a ſervant, an apprentice, or a partner in buſineſs, would pay almoſt as much attention to the blood and parentage, as to the perſon with whom he was to be immediately connected. But if we take notice of what probably gave occaſion to the miſtake, viz. that the wicked children of pious parents are the worſt of any, it is a

truth of the utmoſt moment, and eaſily accounted for. They burſt aſunder the ſtrongeſt ties; they are under the unhappy neceſſity of maſtering conſcience by high-handed wickedneſs, and commonly come to ſpeedy and deſerved ruin: "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and that without remedy."

(3.) Do not ſatisfy yourſelves with a name to live, while you are dead. Though ſome young perſons religiouſly educated, by falling into diſſolute ſociety, become open profligates, there are others who retain the form without the life of religion: Therefore, if nature hath given you amiable diſpoſitions; if theſe have been cultivated by a pious and prudent education; if you feel the reſtraint of natural conſcience; if you are deſirous of public praiſe, or afraid of public ſhame, do not neglect any of theſe preſervatives from ſin; but yet endeavour to obtain, and ſee that you be governed by a principle ſuperior to them all, the hope of final acceptance with God through Chriſt. Aſk of him to give you a new heart, and a new ſpirit, to "create you anew in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we ſhould walk in them."

In the *laſt* place, this ſubject ſuggeſts ſome important inſtructions to the hearers of the goſpel in general. (1.) Loſe no time in providing for your great and beſt intereſt. Every argument that tends to ſhew the importance of early piety, may be applied with equal or greater force, to ſhew the danger of delay in more advanced years. What is wiſe or amiable in youth, is neceſſary to thoſe who

are nearer their journey's end. But considering myself as speaking to professing Christians, what I would earnestly advise you is, to apply the principles above laid down to particular purposes, as well as to your general conduct. If conscience, or providence, has pointed out to you any thing that you may do to advantage, either for yourselves or others, lose no time in setting about it, because you do not know how little time may be yours: So says the wise man, Eccl. ix. 10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

(2.) Do not forget the improvement of this subject, which our Saviour himself has pointed out; imitate the temper of children; learn to be humble and teachable, gentle and easy to be intreated. Both watch and pray against all violent attachments, rude and boisterous passions, and deep-rooted resentment. Observe how the little lambs lay down their resentment, and forget their quarrels. Under this particular, it is proper to recommend a decency of deportment, and a contempt of all vanity and affectation, as well as simplicity and sincerity of speech, and a contempt of all artifice and refinement. The apostle has given an excellent description of this, 2 Cor. i. 12. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

(3.) Set a good example before others in general, but especially young persons. The old rule, *Maxi-*

ma debetur pueris reverentia, ought to be pondered as well as recollected. It is of much importance what our visible conduct is, at all times, and in all places, because we continually contribute to form each others tempers and habits; but greater caution is necessary in presence of young persons, both because they are most prone to imitation, and because they have the least judgement to make proper distinctions, or to refuse the evil, and choose the good. Some instances might be given, in which things might be said or done, before persons of full understanding, without injury, that could not be done without injury, or at least without danger, before persons in early life.

(4.) In the *last* place, be not wanting in your endeavours and prayers for the public interest of religion, and the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom. Support, by your conduct and conversation, the public credit of religion. What is more powerful over the minds of men and the manners of the age, than public opinion? It is more powerful than the most sanguinary laws. And what is public opinion? It is formed by the sentiments that are most frequently heard, and most approved in conversation. Had we a just sense of the importance of visible religion, what a powerful principle would it be, of prudent, watchful, guarded conduct, in every state and circumstance of life! Whatever reason there may be to complain of the frequency of hypocrisy, or seeking the applause of men, I am afraid there is no less reason to complain of the want of attention to that precept of the apostle, "Look not every man on his own things,

but every man alſo on the things of others;" or of our Lord himſelf, Matth. v. 16. "Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." I apprehend, that theſe ſeemingly oppoſite faults are not always ſeparated, but often found in the ſame perſons; that is to ſay, there may be a ſtrong deſire after, and endeavour to obtain public applauſe, by a few ſplendid and popular actions, and yet but little attention to that prudent and exemplary conduct, which promotes public uſefulneſs. Conſider what you have heard, and the Lord give you underſtanding to improve and apply it, for Chriſt's ſake. Amen.

SERMON X.

DEVOTEDNESS TO GOD.

PSALM cxvi. 16.

O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is something so fervent and affectionate in the language of the man after God's own heart, that it is extremely proper to be adopted by us in acts of adoration, trust, or supplication to God. I am at a loss to determine, whether we ought to consider the Christian's access to God, at his holy table, chiefly under one or other of these views. I am inclined to think, that it is a sort of compound or union of the whole,—Veneration and worship of the eternal God, and the incarnate Redeemer, exhibited to us, and as it were brought near to us by the help of the instituted signs: Reliance and confidence in

God, from the opportunity given us of laying hold of his covenant; and thankful ſupplication to God for his ſupport and countenance, in the ſurrender of ourſelves to his ſervice. I cannot help looking upon the words of the pſalmiſt in this paſſage, as carrying in them a mixture of all theſe holy affections: "O Lord, truly I am thy ſervant; I am thy ſervant, and the ſon of thine handmaid: thou haſt looſed my bonds. I will offer to thee the ſacrifice of thankſgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

This pſalm, of which David is univerſally admitted to be the author, ſeems plainly to have been compoſed after ſome ſignal deliverance, of which the remembrance was freſh upon his mind. It was ſuch as had brought his life itſelf into the moſt imminent danger. He acknowledges, in the verſe preceding the text, the peculiar and gracious care which God takes of the life of his people: "Precious in the ſight of the Lord is the death of his ſaints;" and then makes the profeſſion of relation, gratitude, and duty, contained in the words of the text. As they ſeem to me to be very comprehenſive, and with great propriety to expreſs what ought to be the habitual temper of a Chriſtian, and the frame of ſpirit with which a communicant ought to draw near to God at his table, I ſhall endeavour, in dependence on divine grace,

I. To open the import of the pſalmiſt's declaration and purpoſe.

II. To apply it to you as hearers of the goſpel in general, as well as with a view to the ſacred employment immediately before you.

I. THEN, I propose to open the import of the psalmist's declaration and purpose in the text. This I think may be included in the following particulars, to which I intreat your serious attention.

1. This expression of the king of Israel, implies a very humble sense of his distance from, and dependence upon God as his creature. This is the first view which a penitent hath of himself when he returns to God. It is the first view which a good man hath of himself in his approaches to, or communion with God. And indeed it is what ought to be inseparable from the exercise of every other pious affection. To have as it were high and honourable thoughts of the majesty and greatness of the living God, and a deep and awful impression of the immediate and continual presence of the heart-searching God, this naturally produces the greatest self-abasement, and the most unfeigned subjection of spirit, before our Maker. It leads to a confession of him as Lord over all, and having the most absolute right, not only to the obedience, but to the disposal of all his creatures. I cannot help thinking this is conveyed to us in the language of the psalmist, when he says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant." He was a prince among his subjects, and had many other honourable distinctions, both natural and acquired, among men; but he was sensible of his being a servant and subject of the King of kings; and the force of his expression, "Truly I am thy servant," not only signifies the certainty of the thing, but how deeply and strongly he then felt a conviction of its truth.

Suffer me to say, my brethren, that there is much more in this than many apprehend. The scripture speaks often of the knowledge of God, of a discovery of the glory of God, as a thing peculiar to his people, which is very different from merely speculative opinions as to his nature and perfections. It implies an awful impression of his power and greatness, a deep sense how little the creature is before him, and how entirely it is in his hand. I love that expression used by several pious writers of the last age, of bowing before the sovereignty of God. When a believer or a worshipper hath a proper view of this, when it is brought home upon his spirit, it as it were banishes all other things, all other relations, all other persons; and he is, to his apprehension, alone in the presence of the invisible God. And then, what abasement of soul is of necessity produced! then no language can be found sufficient to express his vileness and nothingness in his own sight. He may be a rich man among his poor neighbours, or a great man among his numerous attendants, or a learned man among the ignorant vulgar; but, alas! he is no more than sinful dust and ashes before the omnipotent Jehovah. There is something very magnificent in the description given by the prophet Isaiah of the majesty of God, and the correspondent sentiments of those who see and feel it, in the 2d chapter of his prophecies, verse 10, 11. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." And again, verses 19, 20, 21,

22. "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the rugged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

2. This declaration of the psalmist implies a confession of his being bound by particular covenant and consent unto God, and a repetition of the same by a new adherence. This, as it was certainly true with regard to him, having often dedicated himself to God, so I take it to be concluded on the reiteration of the expression here, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant." As if he had said, 'O Lord, it is undeniable; it is impossible to recede from it. I am thine by many ties. I am by nature thy subject and thy creature; and I have many times confessed thy right, and promised my own duty.' I need not mention to you, either the examples in the psalmist's writings, or the occasions in his history, on which he solemnly surrendered himself to God. It is sufficient to say, that it was very proper that he should frequently call this to mind, and confess it before God, as what, though it could not make his Creator's right any stronger, would certainly make the

guilt of his own violation of it ſo much the greater. It was certainly alſo a repetition of thoſe engagements, and a ſolemn promiſe of continued adherence to them. There is no appearance in his language, that he either regrets or repents his ſubjection to God; on the contrary, he manifeſts his deliberate approbation of it, as his intereſt as well as duty. What he ſays here to God, has ſomething of the ſame meaning with what he ſays elſewhere to his own ſoul, Pſal. xvi. 2. "O my ſoul, thou haſt ſaid unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord." And he afterwards expreſſes the greateſt complacency in this choice, verſes 5. 6. of the above pſalm, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritence, and my cup; thou maintaineſt my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleaſant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

I take it to be very natural for pious perſons to look back upon their former engagements to God. It is a part of the worſhip they owe to him, not only to glorify him as God, but to adhere to him as their God. It comes in with propriety as a part of confeſſion, of praiſe, and of holy reſolution. It humbles the ſpirit under a ſenſe of ſin, as a breach of promiſe as well as of duty. It is matter of praiſe, that we have been inclined and enabled to give ourſelves to God, according to the beautiful ſentiment of David, who gives thanks to God, that he and his people had been enabled to make ſuch free and liberal contributions to the building of the Temple: 1 Chron. xxix. 13, 14. "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praiſe thy glorious name. But who am I, and

what is my people, that we ſhould be able to offer ſo willingly after this ſort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." It is alſo plainly a part of our new engagement, which is no more than a ratification of what we have often and willingly done before.

3. This declaration of the pſalmiſt is an expreſſion of his peculiar and ſpecial relation to God, "I am thy ſervant, and the ſon of thine handmaid." There is another paſſage of his writings, where the ſame expreſſion occurs: Pſal. lxxxvi. 16. "O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy ſtrength unto thy ſervant, and ſave the ſon of thine handmaid." There is ſome variation indeed among interpreters in the way of illuſtrating this phraſe. Some take it for a figurative way of affirming, that he was bound in the ſtrongeſt manner to God, as thoſe children who were born of a maid-ſervant, and born in his own houſe, are in the moſt abſolute manner his property. Others take it to ſignify his being not only brought up in a viſible church of God, but in a pious family, and educated in his fear; and others would have it to ſignify ſtill more eſpecially, that the pſalmiſt's mother was an eminently pious woman. And indeed I do not think that was a circumſtance, if true, either unworthy of him to remember, or of the Spirit of God to put upon record. In the New Teſtament, we find the apoſtle Paul taking notice of a ſimilar circumſtance in the caſe of Timothy: 2 Tim. i. 5. "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee," &c. Without determining preciſely in what ſenſe to take the words, it is certainly added here

to ſignify ſome peculiar and intimate relation to God, which laid him under the ſtrongeſt ties of adherence and ſubjection.

As there was much beauty and propriety in the pſalmiſt's mentioning this circumſtance, ſo every pious perſon ought, eſpecially in the Lord's ſupper, to recollect the peculiar relations he ſtands under to God. Even as members of the viſible church, we are the ſervants of God, born in his houſe, baptiſed in his name, favoured with the light of the goſpel, bleſſed with clearneſs and fulneſs of inſtruction, animated by eminent and ſhining examples. As many as have been brought up either as children or ſervants in pious families, ſeparated from the ſolicitations, and ſheltered from the inſults of wicked men; careful inſtruction, regular government, faithful admonition, and kind invitation, laid as it were a ſtrict and powerful conſtraint upon them, brought them into, and kept them in the paths of piety and truth; ought they not to remember it with humility and gratitude? nay, if by means of but one pious parent, or other relation, they had been brought to acquaintance with God, it ought to be remembered as laying them under peculiar ties. To all which I only add, that if by the goodneſs of a gracious God, any former means of inſtruction, public or private, or ſingular diſpenſation of providence, has been accompanied with power, it ought to be improved in this new ſurrender of ourſelves to God, at once to increaſe our preſent gratitude, and promote our future ſtedfaſtneſs in the paths of obedience.—This leads me to obſerve,

4. That the declaration of the pſalmiſt implies a ſenſe of gratitude for ſignal mercies: "Thou haſt looſed my bonds." I think it is poſſible that what he had in view immediately here was, deliverance from perſonal affliction, probably a dangerous ſickneſs, threatening immediate diſſolution. But the way in which it is introduced, and the uſe to which it is applied, is equally ſuited to deliverances of every kind, to all ſignal mercies which were greatly needed or highly prized. He aſcribes the honour of it to God, he puts it to his own charge as a debt due to God, and on this account propoſes a return of duty and gratitude to God. It were no difficult matter to produce examples of a ſimilar conduct in the pſalmiſt, on his being favoured with remarkable deliverances in his family, from the enemies of his country, from ſlander and reproach, or in unexpected honour and advancement, as was his from the ſheepfold to the kingdom of Iſrael.

Now, ought not every good man to follow the example of the pſalmiſt in this particular, to remember and acknowledge all inſtances of ſignal mercy? There is ſcarcely any perſon, but may recollect ſeveral examples of theſe in the courſe of their lives. They may remember how earneſtly they deſired deliverance in the time of danger, what a ſenſe of gratitude was upon their minds, when the mercy was recent; and this may be profitably improved for ſtrengthening the ties which they lie under to God their Saviour. This will have a double effect, if the deliverance is implored by the prayer of faith, and if any marks can be diſcerned,

of their having obtained the ſanctified improvement of it. But above all, with what propriety may they adopt the language of the pſalmiſt, if they have been delivered from bondage of ſpirit, as well as fear and ſolicitude, as to their outward ſtate. And it frequently happens, that theſe two go together. It was almoſt always ſo with the pſalmiſt, and it is natural to expect that it will be ſo with every ſerious perſon; for affliction brings ſin to remembrance, and they do not only tremble for the iſſue of the trial under which they groan, but apprehend the holy diſpleaſure of that God, who caſt them into the furnace, and with whom they have to do. But if the candle of the Lord again ſhineth upon them, and they are walking in the light of his countenance, they may well ſay with the pſalmiſt, "O Lord, truly I am thy ſervant, I am thy ſervant, and the ſon of thy hand-maid: thou haſt looſed my bonds."

5. In the *laſt* place, This declaration implies a ſolemn dedication and ſurrender of himſelf to God and his ſervice for the time to come. This is the end of the retroſpect which he takes of his character and ſtate, "I will offer to thee the ſacrifice of thankſgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord." He was reſolved to live a life of gratitude to God, to take all methods of openly and publicly acknowledging him as the author of his mercies. If we would ſee farther his purpoſe, we may look back to verſes 8, 9, & 10. "For thou haſt delivered my ſoul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." He promiſes therefore a life of obedience; and as the ſource of

thankful truſt and acquieſcence in God, he ſeems, by the 11th verſe, to have been diſconcerted by diſcovering the treachery of men; but every thing is rectified and made up by the goodneſs and all-ſufficiency of God.

So, my brethren, ought every perſon who is this day to ſit down at the table of the Lord, after a ſerious recollection of all his paſt mercies, to devote and conſecrate himſelf unto God. Take him for your portion: place your happineſs in his favour; receive your daily bread from him as his gift; pay for every mercy the tribute of praiſe; live not upon the creature without God, but endeavour to enrich and ſweeten created comforts, by communion with God: Reſolve to ſerve him with your body and ſpirit which are his; ſerve him ſincerely, reſolving that nothing ſhall have quiet poſſeſſion of your heart, or indulgence in your life, that is contrary to his will. Serve him with zeal, eſpouſe his intereſt, plead his cauſe, and eſteem it your honour, if by your authority, by your talents, by your ſubſtance, you can promote his glory. Put your truſt in his providence. You are yet in the body, liable to all the viciſſitudes of this mortal ſtate. Be perſuaded of the infinite wiſdom and all-ſufficiency of God. Let him diſpoſe of you freely. Reſiſt exceſſive anxiety and fear, and oppoſe to all the gloomy horrors of a fruitful apprehenſion, the ſhield of faith in almighty ſtrength, which is able to bear you up ſuperior to every trial, and to every enemy. Do in every caſe of difficulty as the prophet Iſaiah, in the name of God, invites the people of Iſrael to do on the approach of public judgement, Iſaiah xxvi. 20.

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

I PROCEED now, in the *last* place, to make some practical improvement of this subject.

1. Suffer me, my brethren, to plead with every sinner; to plead with every hearer in this assembly, the right of his Maker to his service. He hath made and formed you, and his visitation preserves your spirits. He only holdeth your soul in life, and unto him belong the issues from death. Of him, and to him, and through him, are all things. Have you therefore served him as your master, and placed your happiness in his favour? I choose, my brethren, to assert God's dominion over his creatures, that if it please him to accompany it with his Spirit, it may carry conviction to many who are living in quiet and self-satisfaction, although they are dead in trespasses and sins. Many, if they are free from grosser corruptions, are no way apprehensive of the danger of being *without God* in the world. Ignorance of themselves, extenuation of sin, foolishly placing a merit in a few common outside duties, and presumptuous hopes in God's general mercy, are the delusive grounds of the hope of such persons. Nay, sometimes (alas for their folly!) the chief thing they have to trust to, is the ill that they have *not* done. I really do not swear, says one, I hate drinking abominably, it is a beastly vice. What signify these partial justifications? I have known, though it is not common I confess,

an habitual adulterer that would not ſwear, and I could ſhew you a covetous hard-hearted wretch, grinding every day the faces of the poor, that will neither drink nor ſwear. But are you the ſervants of God? are you devoted to his fear? Believe it, firſt, there is an abſolute neceſſity for an entire change in your nature, to fit you for the kingdom of God. You are his creatures, you ought to be his ſervants; and in one ſenſe indeed his enemies are his ſervants, becauſe they are under the dominion of his providence, and ſhall at laſt be the monuments of his vengeance. Be warned then in time, for you may reſt aſſured that no man hath hardened himſelf againſt him, and proſpered.

2. But, in the *next* place, I will not omit giving warning of their danger, to ſuch as are living in open and avowed profanity. They are ſo far from being the ſervants of God, that they are his enemies, his confederated enemies, and the enemies of every thing that ſtands in a viſible relation to him. I will once more, my brethren, take the liberty to denounce the judgement of God againſt all ſuch perſons; and I am preaching the goſpel of Chriſt while I am doing ſo, for he ſhall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire. And all profane ſwearers that ſpeak the language of hell on earth, ſhall have it as their abode for ever. All deſpirers of the ſabbath of reſt

SERMON XI.

THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY SAVED, AND THE WICKED CERTAINLY DESTROYED.

1 PETER, iv. 18.

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

ALL mankind may be divided into two great claſſes, the righteous and the wicked, the friends and the enemies of God, the heirs of glory and the heirs of hell. Theſe, though mixed together on earth, and in many caſes not eaſily to be diſtinguiſhed by men, are yet eſſentially different in their characters, and ſhall at laſt meet with a very different fate. Of how much moment would it be for every one to ſee his own character and ſtate before the final ſeparation, when the Judge ſhall divide them, one from the other, as a ſhepherd divideth the ſheep from the goats!

There are many awful tokens of divine juſtice and holineſs in the adminiſtration of providence, which ought to be conſidered by us as preludes to the great day of retribution, when God ſhall ren-

der to every man according to his works. The apoſtle Peter, in the verſes preceding the text, is ſpeaking of the divine judgements which were coming upon that generation, and which were in part to fall even upon the church and people of God. From this he takes occaſion to point out the infinitely greater danger of impenitent ſinners, who were expoſed not only to the ſame or heavier temporal ſtrokes, but to a final and eternal deſtruction, verſe 17. "For the time is come that judgement muſt begin at the houſe of God: and if it firſt begin at us, what ſhall the end be of them that obey not the goſpel of God?" Conſider alſo, that God in righteous ſeverity ſees it neceſſary to make even his own people to paſs through the furnace, and through much tribulation, to enter into the kingdom of God. He inſtitutes the compariſon in the text, to point out the dreadful ſtate of the finally impenitent: "And if the righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear?"

In diſcourſing further upon this ſubject, what I propoſe is,

I. To explain the import of the declaration, or ſuppoſition, in the firſt part of the text, that "the righteous ſcarcely are ſaved."

II. To conſider the concluſion drawn from it by the apoſtle, "where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear?"

III. I ſhall make a practical improvement of the ſubject, for your inſtruction and direction.

In the *firſt* place, then, I am to explain the import of the declaration, or ſuppoſition, in the firſt

part of the text, that "the righteous are ſcarcely ſaved." There is the greater neceſſity for this, that the expreſſion is both ſtrong and ſingular. There are many paſſages, indeed, which carry in them truths akin to it, and founded upon it; but the ſentiment itſelf is almoſt peculiar to this paſſage, that "the righteous are ſcarcely ſaved." There are ſome, who ſuppoſe that the expreſſion is borrowed from, or alludes to, Prov. xi 31. "Behold, the righteous ſhall be recompenſed in the earth: much more the wicked and the ſinner." The meaning they give thus: Even the righteous muſt expect to meet with ſufferings and calamities on earth, much more wicked men, under the juſt diſpleaſure of a holy God. But I think it is plain, that the apoſtle in our text has an eye to the deciſive judgement of the laſt day; for he ſays in the preceding verſe, "What ſhall the end be of them that obey not the goſpel of God?" It is no where ſaid in ſcripture, that wicked men ſhall be puniſhed in the preſent life, in a manner fully adequate to their guilt, much leſs that a juſt and viſible proportion is to be obſerved between their ſufferings and thoſe of the ſervants of God. On the contrary, they are called the men of the world; it is ſaid, they have their part and portion in this life, and their proſperity, compared with the trials and ſufferings of good men, appears to have been in every age a ſource of temptation to the children of God.

We muſt therefore underſtand the apoſtle as ſpeaking of the eternal ſtate, both of the righteous and the wicked, in the correſpondent parts of this paſſage. What, then, is the meaning of the righ-

teous being ſcarcely ſaved? It cannot mean that there is any defect or ſtraitneſs in the mercy of God. The invitation to ſinners in the goſpel, is not only urgent, but full, free, and infinitely gracious. It cannot mean that there is any defect in the mind or power of our Redeemer, as if the ſecurity of thoſe who put their truſt in him were to be doubted, or their victory over all the enemies of their ſalvation were uncertain. To affix any ſuch meaning to the words, would be to ſet them in direct oppoſition to many other paſſages of ſcripture, and to do the greateſt injury to the divine wiſdom and truth. In order, therefore, to open the import of this intereſting declaration, you may obſerve the following things.

1. The righteous may be ſaid to be ſcarcely ſaved, becauſe all are juſtly liable to divine vengeance; and it is only of the free grace, and ſovereign mercy of God, that any are ſaved. This, my brethren, is a truth of the greateſt moment, repeated in almoſt every page of the ſacred oracles, but which none can either underſtand or approve, till they are effectually humbled by the Spirit of God. It is, however, the ſum and ſubſtance of the goſpel. See in what terms it is applied by the apoſtle Paul, Eph. ii. 4.—10. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in ſins, hath quickened us together with Chriſt, (by grace ye are ſaved); and hath raiſed us up together, and made us ſit together in heavenly places in Chriſt Jeſus: that in the ages to come he might ſhew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindneſs towards us, through

Chriſt Jeſus. For by grace are ye ſaved through faith; and that not of yourſelves; it is the gift of God: not of works, leſt any man ſhould boaſt: For we are his workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we ſhould walk in them." There is not a believer on earth, nor a ſaint in heaven, but who is ready to acknowledge, that he was by nature an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works; that he had highly provoked him; and that if God had dealt with him in ſtrict juſtice, he would have been for ever baniſhed from his preſence and enjoyment. Probably many will recollect the time of their ignorance and ſecurity, and admire the patience of God towards them, and ſee that they are indeed ſcarcely ſaved, ſince they have been brought back from the very brink of deſtruction. If any malefactor had been arraigned, judged, and condemned to die, and after apprehending the juſt puniſhment of his crime, ſhould be ſaved by an act of royal clemency, at a ſtake or on a ſcaffold, would he not conſider himſelf as ſcarcely ſaved? But this is no more than a juſt image of the ſtate and views of a pardoned ſinner, and what will continue to be the views of thoſe who have entered into reſt. They are clothed with white robes, as an emblem, not of innocence, but abſolution, and the ſong of praiſe which they ſing intimates the condition from which they were brought, Rev. v. 9. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the ſeals thereof; for thou waſt ſlain, and haſt redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;" verſe 12. "Worthy is

the Lamb that was ſlain, to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and ſtrength, and honour, and glory, and bleſſing."

This leads me to obſerve, that as their ſalvation is of ſoverign grace in the Father's love, ſo it was purchaſed by the moſt amazing ſufferings of their Redeemer in their room. They are ſcarcely ſaved, not only from the want of merit in themſelves, but from the infinite expence and coſt laid out by him for their redemption. Such was the evil of ſin, and ſo deplorable the ſtate of the ſinner, that the wiſdom, truth, and holineſs of God, ſeemed all to demand his perdition. The whole creation could not furniſh a ſufficient ranſom; for the redemption of the ſoul was precious, and it ceaſed for ever. Then the eternal Son of God, clothed with infinite mercy, and conveyed in ſovereign power, preſented himſelf as our Redeemer, ſaying, "Lo, I come," &c. Oh, amazing truth! Oh, unſearchable ſubject! Juſtly may I ſay, that the righteous ſcarcely are ſaved, ſince it required ſo coſtly an expiation. Let us remember in faith what our Saviour endured in the garden and on the croſs, before he could ſay it was finiſhed; and we ſhall be conſtrained to confeſs that it was no eaſy undertaking to redeem thoſe ſouls that were forfeited to divine juſtice.

To conclude this particular, the righteous are ſcarcely ſaved, becauſe the application of this redemption to their ſouls, and their being brought to an unfeigned acceptance of it, required the almighty power and energy of the Spirit of grace. This alſo is a part of that revealed truth, which the natural man hears with reluctance, and cannot receive.

Yet it is not only plainly taught in ſcripture, but daily ratified in experience. John, i. 13. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Without the power of the Holy Ghoſt, the goſpel may be preached to ſinners from day to day, and from year to year, and yet they ſhall continue in their natural and miſerable ſtate.

It is the work of the Spirit to open the blinded underſtanding, to awaken the ſecure and dozing conſcience, and to bend the ſtubborn will to the obedience of the goſpel. We are alſo plainly given to underſtand, that if a ſinner long reſiſts the motions of the Spirit, the conſequence, in the œconomy of providence, is frequently that this divine agent departs from him, and ceaſes any longer to ſtrive with him. Every ſuch perſon is left to himſelf, given up to the dominion of his luſts, and the enſlaving power of habit; and ſo fills up the meaſure of his iniquities, till he is ripe for final judgement and deſtruction. Let us ſeriouſly conſider, that if ſuch proviſion was made by an all-wiſe God, for the recovery of ſuch of his creatures as had fallen by their iniquity, it could not be unneceſſary. And ſurely the whole of theſe views conſpire in opening the meaning and confirming the truth of what we are told in this paſſage, that the righteous are ſcarcely ſaved.

2. The righteous may be ſaid to be ſcarcely ſaved, becauſe their number is but very ſmall. There are few that be ſaved, in compariſon of thoſe that periſh, and in compariſon of thoſe that ſeek and pretend to hope for ſalvation.

This, if it be a truth, is certainly pregnant with meaning, and deeply intereſting. I know there are ſome who have no great love to any thing that directly tends to diſturb the repoſe of a drowſy ſlothful ſpirit, who are fond of denying or calling in queſtion this truth. They alledge that our Saviour evaded it as an improper queſtion, when propoſed to him by his diſciples. Luke, xiii. 23. "Then ſaid one unto him, Lord, are there few that be ſaved?" But truly I cannot ſee how he could have anſwered it more plainly, or indeed more properly, than in the following words: "Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able;" eſpecially if we compare them with the parallel place in Matth. vii. 13. "Enter ye in at the ſtrait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to deſtruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

What ſhall be the number of the redeemed at laſt, and what proportion it ſhall bear to the whole race of Adam, before the end of this ſtate of things, it is impoſſible for us to know. It is pleaſant to indulge the hope that it ſhall be very great, and that there are times yet to come, when the proſperity of the Redeemer's kingdom ſhall be glorious, and the triumphs of his grace perhaps univerſal. But when we ſpeak of the number of ſuch as ſhall be ſaved, we muſt ſpeak of it as relating to thoſe whom we now ſee, and their characters as drawn in the oracles of truth. And ſurely, if we pay the leaſt regard to the marks of religion laid down in the ſcriptures, we muſt be ſenſible what

multitudes are living in direct oppoſition to them, and that there are many, who, though they are called by the name of Chriſt, and maintain ſome degree of outward profeſſion, yet they are far from being Chriſtians indeed and in truth: Matth. vii. 21. "Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

3. When the apoſtle ſays that the righteous ſcarcely are ſaved, it may mean that many make not only a common but an eminent profeſſion of religion, who yet ſhall be found finally defective, when weighed in the balance of the ſanctuary. It may mean, that not only the ungodly and openly profane ſinners ſhall be rejected, but that all who ſeem to be righteous ſhall not be found ſo upon trial. This ſeems to lead us to conſider the difference between the charitable, general, and uncertain judgement of man, and the ſtrict, infallible, and deciſive judgement of God. This is beautifully repreſented by our Saviour, in the parable of the tares of the field, Matth. xiii. 24. and onwards; but you may particularly ſee what is ſaid from the 28th verſe, "The ſervants ſaid unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he ſaid, Nay, leſt while ye gather up the tares, ye root up alſo the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harveſt; and in the time of harveſt I will ſay to the reapers, Gather ye together firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

There is a circumſtance to be particularly attended to here, that not only ſhall many deceive their fellow-creatures by a falſe profeſſion, but not a few ſhall more effectually and more fatally deceive themſelves, ſaying they ſhall have peace though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. There are many exhortations in ſcripture, to guard againſt deceiving ourſelves; of which I ſhall only mention one, Gal. iv. 7. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap." If our Saviour found it neceſſary to ſay to the twelve whom he had choſen, "Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of;" much more may the ſame thing be ſaid to numbers of profeſſing Chriſtians in theſe laſt days. There are many ſins that may adhere to a religious profeſſion, or be covered with a ſacred veil, which yet are inconſiſtent with true religion. See what the apoſtle Paul ſays, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. "Though I ſpeak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as ſounding braſs, or a tinkling cymbal." And the apoſtle James, i. 26. "If any man among you ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." It is an awful deſcription given us by our Saviour, Matth. vii. 22. "Many will ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have caſt out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

I shall only add one evidence, with which experience furnishes us, that even in an eminent profession there may be at bottom no sincerity. There never was a time of trial in the church by persecution, but there were several of the most eminent in station, gifts, and profession, who were guilty of apostacy; a sure evidence that they were not found in the faith, and a great lesson of humiliation and caution to us. True religion bears all trials, and it is only he that endureth to the end that shall be saved. It is highly probable that the apostle had this very thing in view in the passage where my text lies; for in the preceding verse, he had been animating them to suffer as Christians, and concludes in the following verse thus: "Wherefore let them that suffer, according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator."

4. In the *last* place, The righteous are scarcely saved, because those who are saved shall be saved with much difficulty; that is to say, it will require the utmost exertion of their care and vigilance. They may expect a continual conflict with temptations and trials from without, and the stirrings of corruptions from within. There is nothing more contrary to the scripture-view of our Christian course, than to suppose it a state of unmolested quiet, security, and indulgence. It is represented to us by every image that carries in it the idea of opposition, activity, and vigilance. It is striving, Matth. vii. 13. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go

in thereat." It is contending in a race, Heb. xii. 1. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." It is fighting, 1 Tim. vi. 12. "Fight the good fight of faith;" and it is represented as incessant labour, Phil. ii. 12. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Indeed, when we consider from what, and how many quarters, we must expect opposition, this truth will appear with the fullest evidence. Consider the implacable hatred of the great adversary, the reproach and injuries of wicked men, their still more pernicious example and solicitation, the allurements of the world in this sensible state, and the treachery and deceitfulness of our own hearts. Of the great danger of all these we have the greatest reason to be convinced from the confession and testimony of those who have gone before us; yet over them all the believer must obtain the victory, and shall obtain it in his Redeemer's strength: 1 John, v. 4. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

There is nothing here said contrary to what the scripture informs us, of the peace and consolation that attends the practice of true religion. It is not said to discourage the believer; but to put him on his guard, and to warn him not to mistake the nature and foundation of that peace he is entitled to expect. It does not consist in a neglect of his enemies, far less in a confederacy with or subjection

to them, but in the assured prospect, and growing evidence of his victory over them. Further, the inward consolation of a Christian does not consist in thinking light of sin, by excusing it, or justifying himself by denying it; but in unfeigned self-denial, a willingness to see the evil of sin, and taking shame to himself by confessing it, together with evangelical views of divine mercy in the pardon of it, and the promised strength of divine grace to enable him to resist and subdue it.

II. I PROCEED now to the *second* thing proposed, which was to consider the inference drawn in the last part of the verse, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" I need scarcely tell you, that the form of a question used here, is a very common figure of speech to signify their dreadful situation. This just but very awful inference, is intended for the terror of those who live in open ungodliness, and avowed contempt of divine mercy. Perhaps it may be proper, from the context, to consider a little the time when the wicked shall be exposed to this terrible danger; and then the import of the threatening itself. As to the time when the difference is to appear, it may be,

1. In a time of public calamity, or any remarkable visitation of divine severity. Such a time is described, Luke, xxi. 25. 26. "There shall be upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Then the conscience of

the moſt obdurate is ſometimes alarmed. I am ſenſible, and I have formerly hinted, that good men have no charter of exemption from outward ſufferings. But in theſe times of general trial, the difference between them and others is very great. They have an anchor of hope in the favour of a reconciled, and in the wiſdom and providence of an omnipotent God. But the profane and ungodly, terrified by the reproaches of a guilty conſcience, are made to tremble, through fear of the execution of deſerved judgement.

2. In a time of perſonal diſtreſs, and apparent danger of death. This important change is no light matter, even to the beſt. They have often no ſmall degree of ſolicitude and fear, as to the manner of going through this laſt and deciſive conflict. But how much more fearful an aſpect muſt the king of terrors wear to the impenitent ſinner! when the charm is diſſolved, and all his ſinful pleaſures are turned into wormwood and gall; when he ſees he muſt bid an eternal farewell to every ſenſual delight, enter into a world of ſpirits, and appear in the preſence of God. But,

3. Both theſe are only preparatory to the day of judgement, "For we muſt all appear before the judgement-ſeat of Chriſt." Then his people ſhall lift up their heads with joy, for the day of their redemption has arrived. But with what inexpreſſible confuſion ſhall the wicked then be covered! In vain ſhall they call upon the mountains and hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb. Now they affront his perſon, oppoſe his reign, reſiſt his Spirit, and ſcorn his ſervants. But where ſhall they

appear, and what will they do, when the "Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel?"

This leads me more particularly to consider the import of the inference in the text, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" And I think it plainly carries in it three things, that from the holiness and severity of God, and the righteous scarcely being saved, we may learn the certainty, the greatness, and the justice, of the punishment of impenitent sinners.

1. The certainty of it: That as the threatenings are awful, the execution shall be inevitable. Men are exceedingly prone, from partiality to themselves, and from the suggestions of the father of lies, to disbelieve the threatenings as well as the promises of God. This was a great part of the temptation to the commission of the first sin, Gen. iii. 4. "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." And the credit that was given to it at that time, has been continued by sinners in every subsequent age. They are ready to presume upon the general goodness of God, and to flatter themselves that his threatenings shall be either wholly remitted or greatly abated. We find that some men of corrupt minds have even set themselves to reason against the rigour of the scripture-denunciations against sin, and the eternal punishment of sinners.

But how fatal the delusion! The truth of God is an inseparable bar to this deceitful expectation:

Iſa. iii. 10. 11. "Say ye to the righteous, that it ſhall be well with him; for they ſhall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it ſhall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands ſhall be given him." Pſal. l. 21. 22. "Theſe things haſt thou done, and I kept ſilence: thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch an one as thyſelf: but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thine eyes. Now, conſider this, ye that forget God, leſt I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Nay, not only is this aſſerted in the word of God, but the whole procedure of divine providence ſerves to confirm it. If the ſalvation of the righteous is with difficulty obtained; if their redemption is ſo dearly purchaſed; if Chriſt muſt bleed before they can be forgiven; how ſhall the ungodly be able to ſtand in the judgement! If even the ſervants of God muſt be expoſed to ſo many ſufferings in the day of trial, what muſt be the condition of his enemies in the day of retribution? If even the ſins of the holy muſt be viſited, how ſhall the crimes of the impenitent paſs unpuniſhed? This is plainly one part of the truth contained in this paſſage; and whoever will deliberately conſider the uniform tenor of the holy ſcriptures, and compare it with the diſpenſations of divine providence, will have reaſon to tremble at the dreadful ſtate of incorrigible ſinners, and to ſay with the apoſtle Paul, Heb. xii. 25. "See that ye refuſe not him that ſpeaketh. For if they eſcaped not who refuſed him that ſpake on earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven."

2. The expreſſion in the text implies the greatneſs of the puniſhment of ſinners. It is indeed, my brethren, every where repreſented in ſcripture in ſuch terms as ſerve to convey to us the moſt dreadful apprehenſions of its weight, as well as the deepeſt conviction of its certainty. It is repreſented as the blackneſs of darkneſs for ever, and as a worm that ſhall never die. But the image moſt commonly uſed is fire, which is the moſt terrible to ſenſe, of all the elements we have any knowledge of. It is a lake that burns with fire and brimſtone for evermore. Without entering at all into the queſtion, How much is literal, and how much figurative in theſe images, the juſt concluſion from them is, that thoſe who ſhall be the final monuments of divine vengeance, ſhall be in a ſtate ſorrowful and comfortleſs as darkneſs, painful as a gnawing worm, and dreadful as fire.

This is alſo manifeſtly founded on the reflection in the text, "If the righteous are ſcarcely ſaved:" if they ſuffer ſo much at preſent by divine permiſſion, if they ſuffer ſo much by the perſecution of the ungodly, what a load of vengeance awaits the wicked in the day of reckoning, when he will recompenſe tribulation to the troublers of his choſen! If there is ſo much holy ſeverity neceſſary on account of ſin even in the preſent life, which is the time of divine forbearance, even towards the children of God, who are the objects of his everlaſting love, what ſhall be the ſtate of thoſe who have out-ſinned the ſeaſon of his grace, and forfeited all title to his mercy, on whom he intends at once to glorify his juſtice, and to magnify his power? Hear

the words of the Holy Ghoſt, 2 Theſſ. i. 9. "Who ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

3. The expreſſion in the text implies the juſtice of the puniſhment of ſinners. This is a circumſtance always to be taken in, for at the laſt day he ſhall judge the world in righteouſneſs by that man whom he hath ordained. He ſhall judge the world in righteouſneſs, and the people with his truth. This is a circumſtance not only for the illuſtration of the glory of God, but for the manifeſtation of the preſent truth. If the puniſhment of ſinners were not juſt, it could not be great; if it were not known and felt by themſelves to be juſt, it would not be intolerable.

SERMON XII.

THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW, xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

A CLEAR view of divine truth is of the utmoſt moment, both to the holineſs and comfort of the children of God. They are ſanctified by the truth. It is no leſs neceſſary, by manifeſtation of the truth, to turn ſinners from the error of their ways; for the word of God is quick and powerful. While we keep theſe things in view, we ought alſo to remember, that the truths of God are injured, not only by oppoſition, but perverſion. We are aſſured, that thoſe who are unlearned and unſtable wreſt this good word of God to their own deſtruction. If this is the caſe, it follows naturally, that as the bait is moſt dangerous, when the hook is moſt effectually concealed; ſo falſehood will be moſt apt to inſinuate itſelf, when it wears the habit, and has the greateſt reſemblance to real truth.

The reaſon of my uſing this introduction to what ſhall be offered on the text now read, is, that it is one of the paſſages moſt frequently, and moſt artfully perverted, or moſt unhappily miſapplied. It

contains a moſt important and ſalutary truth, if taken in its proper meaning, and according to the analogy of faith. But, as it is wreſted and perverted by men of corrupt minds, it is often made to convey a ſtupifying and dangerous poiſon. What more important, than to deſtroy the unjuſt accuſations of the father of lies, as if religion were a heavy and unſupportable burden? But if, on the other hand, the ſame thing is made uſe of to ſew pillows for all arm-holes, and ſing the ſinner aſleep in ſecurity, it is equally deſtructive. Therefore, in diſcourſing of this ſubject, through the aſſiſtance of divine grace, I will endeavour,

I. To ſhew you what you are not to ſuppoſe implied in this declaration of our Lord, "My yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light."

II. What is its true and proper meaning; and,

III. In the laſt place, to apply the ſubject.

I. Then, I am to ſhew you what you are not to ſuppoſe implied in this declaration of our Lord, "My yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light." On this, I beſeech you to attend to the following obſervations.

1. When our Saviour ſays, "My yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light," you are not to ſuppoſe that he has narrowed the extent, or weakened the obligation of the law of God. There are ſome who ſpeak in ſuch terms, as if they thought that Chriſt had granted ſome licenſe and indulgence to human corruption; that he had abated the ſeverity of the law, and would not be ſo highly offended by the tranſgreſſion of it. Becauſe we are

taught that he hath redeemed us from the curſe of the law, or the rigour of its ſanction as a covenant of works, they ſpeak as if they thought, or at leaſt ſo as to lead others to think, that he hath made void the obligation of it as a rule of duty. But the law of God is perfect, eternal, and unchangeable. It is a tranſcript of his own nature, which he will not, or which, I ſpeak it with reverence, he cannot diſpenſe with. The ſcripture expreſsly ſays, that he cannot deny himſelf.

Now, our bleſſed Lord himſelf has told us upon this ſubject, Matth. v. 17. 18. "Think not that I am come to deſtroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil. For verily I ſay unto you, Till heaven and earth paſs, one jot or one tittle ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the law, till all be fulfilled." Agreeably to this, he hath been ſo far from narrowing the extent of the law, that he hath aſſerted its honour, vindicated it from the falſe gloſſes and looſe interpretation of the Scribes and Phariſees; and pointed out its ſpirituality and influence upon the conſcience and heart. See ſeveral inſtances of this in the above-cited chapter, particularly verſes 21. 22. & 27. 28. "Ye have heard that it was ſaid by them of old time, Thou ſhalt not kill: and, whoſoever ſhall kill, ſhall be in danger of the judgement: But I ſay unto you, That whoſoever is angry with his brother without a cauſe, ſhall be in danger of the judgement; and whoſoever ſhall ſay to his brother, Raca, ſhall be in danger of the council: but whoſoever ſhall ſay, Thou fool, ſhall be in danger of hell-fire. Ye have heard that it was ſaid by them of old time, Thou ſhalt

not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." How distant is this from relaxation, or from modifying and accommodating the law to the corruptions of men! And as to the obligation of the law, nothing is more clear, than that our Saviour has not taken from, but added to it in many ways. He has added to it by the clearness of the discovery which he hath made of the divine nature and will; by the most glorious display of divine mercy through him; and, as a just and necessary consequence, by the awful threatenings which he hath denounced against those who shall continue to despise the grace of the gospel. Hebrews, ii. 2. 3. "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" And the same epistle, ch. x. verses 26, 27, 28, 29. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

2. When our Saviour says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," you are not to suppose he means to say, that real and acceptable obedience to the law of God is an easy thing to men, as they are in themselves, or in a sinful and unrenewed state. O! say some, the gospel is a humane and gentle dispensation, the same does not bear hard upon human weakness. If we should make him to say this, my brethren, we should make him to speak in direct opposition to many other passages of scripture, as well as to daily experience, and the nature and reason of the thing. Men may, if they please, create to themselves an image of religion, that shall be quite gentle and pliant, that shall have nothing in it offensive to corrupt nature, or at any time opposed to the manners of fashionable life; but nothing can be more distant from New-Testament truth. There we are told, that, Rom. viii. 7. 8. because "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be: so then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God." There we are told, that men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, that their recovery is the work of Omnipotence, even *the mighty power of God*, and that none can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, but God alone. But why should we multiply passages of scripture to this purpose, when it is manifest from the nature of the thing and daily experience? If it were easy in this sense to put on Christ's yoke, it would also be common. Is not the prevalence of wickedness a proof to the contrary? Can any thing be more opposite than sin and holiness? Nothing, not even

light and darkneſs. Can any man, then, ſerve two maſters? Is it an eaſy thing to love ſin, and practiſe holineſs? Do we ſee it is ſo in any inſtance? Do we reckon it is eaſy for the drunkard to deny his appetite, when he ſees the liquor giving its colour in the cup, and moving itſelf aright? Is it eaſy for the malicious perſon to govern his tongue, or the covetous man to open his heart? The truth is, it is a direct contradiction, for the law of the Lord ſearches, and chiefly requires the obedience of the heart; and therefore to ſuppoſe, or imagine, that the generality of men, who are under the dominion of ſin, may notwithſtanding keep the commandments of God, is an abſurdity which we would not be guilty of, in any other ſubject. "Either, ſays our Saviour, "make the tree good, and his fruit good," &c. "Can a fountain ſend out at the ſame place ſweet water and bitter?"

3. When our Saviour ſays, "My yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light," you are not to ſuppoſe, that it is an eaſy or trifling thing, or what the ſinner may do at any time by his own ſtrength, to turn from ſin to God. Nothing can be a more pernicious or a more ſtupifying doſe to a poor careleſs ſinner, than to make him ſuppoſe that he may eaſily at any time repent, when neceſſity ſhall urge him to it. The whole ſyſtem of divine truth ſtands in direct oppoſition to this error. There our condition by nature is conſidered as not only miſerable, but helpleſs. It is divine power alone that can effect the change: John, vi. 44. "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath ſent me draw him: and I will raiſe him up at the laſt day."

Pſal. cx. 3. " Thy people ſhall be willing in the day of thy power." The greatneſs of the change neceſſary to ſalvation demonſtrates the ſame thing: John, iii. 3. " Verily, verily, I ſay unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God." The multitudes that periſh is a further proof. " Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate," &c. To this may be added the danger of delay, and the hardening power of habit, as frequently mentioned in ſcripture: Eccleſ. xii. 1. " Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou ſhalt ſay, I have no pleaſure in them. Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo who are accuſtomed to do evil learn to do well." To crown the whole, there are inſtances in which the day of God's patience and forbearance is cloſed, and the ſinner's eyes ſhall not be opened on his danger: Luke, xix. 41. 42. " And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, ſaying, If thou hadſt known, even thou, at leaſt in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." 2 Theſſ. ii. 11. " For this cauſe God ſhall ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lie."

4. When Chriſt ſays, " My yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light," we are not to ſuppoſe that even the children of God ſhall meet with no difficulties in their way. It ſeems to be the miſtake of ſome perſons to think that ſo ſoon as they have truly embraced the goſpel, and obtained peace with God, the conflict is over, they ſhall have an eaſy

and ſlothful aſſurance, without oppoſition either from affliction or temptation. But this is quite contrary to what the ſcripture teaches to expect. It teaches us to lay our account with oppoſition from every quarter, injury from without, and treachery from within. The life of a Chriſtian muſt be a life of vigilance and prayer. Outward peace, ill-founded peace, a ſecure unfaithful conſcience, is what we have the greateſt reaſon to dread. Theſe are hard ſayings in the goſpel, which even the children of God find it difficult to receive. We are expoſed to continual temptation from the world and from worldly men, and to frequent trials, both as we are men and Chriſtians: Heb. xii. 5. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which ſpeaketh unto you as unto children, My ſon, deſpiſe not thou the chaſtening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." In the Chriſtian warfare there is no truce. It is only he that ſhall endure to the end that ſhall be ſaved. The laſt enemy that ſhall be deſtroyed is death.

HAVING thus rejected theſe falſe and miſtaken apprehenſions ſometimes ſuggeſted by this paſſage of ſcripture, and greatly encouraged by ſmooth and mollifying teachers, it remains, that I ſhould proceed to point out the true and proper meaning of it, and what we are to underſtand when the Redeemer invites ſinners to come to him, by ſaying, "My yoke is eaſy, and my burden is light." And becauſe there are many things pertaining to this ſubject, that throw light upon each other, I ſhall endeavour to take in the whole compaſs of it, ma-

king, however, the illuſtration of each particular very ſhort.

1. The yoke of Chriſt may be ſaid to be eaſy, and his burden light, becauſe his right to command is undeniable: the authority with which he is inveſted is complete and full. I have placed this firſt, becauſe it lies at the foundation of all religion, and is nothing elſe but the ſupreme authority and abſolute dominion of Jehovah. We all naturally think it hard to ſubmit to uſurped authority, or unjuſt dominion; but when the title to command is clear, obedience immediately appears to be reaſonable and neceſſary, and becomes our unfeigned choice, or the deſire of the heart. Thus, nothing can be more clear than the right of our Maker to the obedience and ſubmiſſion of all his creatures. It is the ſenſe of this carried home upon the conſcience, that gives the firſt riſe to conviction of ſin. A diſcovery of the power and majeſty of the living God, lays the creature in the duſt, and produces ſubjection. But when to this is added, that he is Lord and proprietor of all; that all things were made by him, and for him, then ſin appears in the light of injuſtice and rebellion, and obedience, abſolute and unconditional, is felt to be his due. Believe it, my brethren, when the revolted creature returns to his allegiance, when the convinced ſinner ſees the guilt of his rebellion, it at once reconciles him to the law, and makes him willing to put on the yoke.

The ſame thing is a conſtant and growing principle of obedience to the believer. He ſees that he is not his own. He perceives and admits his Creator's and Redeemer's right. He is convinced, that as all

things were made for, as all things ſhall finally tend to, ſo every intelligent creature ought ſupremely to aim at the glory of God. It is this radical principle that chiefly conſtitutes the difference between genuine obedience, and that conſtrained ſervice which may be ſometimes falſely ſo called. Hence it is that true obedience in conſidered as a debt that is *due* to God; falſe obedience, on the contrary, is conſidered as a debt *charged* upon God. The real Chriſtian is happy in ſo far as he is able to obey, and ſincerely grieves for any remaining backwardneſs and reluctance in his mind. The yoke may well be ſaid to be eaſy, when he is brought to that temper and diſpoſition, that it is not what he does, but what he omits, that fills him with grief, or covers him with ſhame.

2. The Redeemer's yoke is eaſy, and his burden light, becauſe all his commands are in themſelves perfectly juſt and right. It is hard, indeed, to be obliged to do what we cannot approve; and ſo long as the ſinner has any objection againſt the law, obedience muſt be a burden. But every renewed mind obtains a diſcovery of the infinite amiableneſs of the divine nature, and the excellence and perfection of the divine law. The law is holy, ſays the apoſtle, Rom. vii. 12. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and juſt, and good." The law of God is a tranſcript of his own infinite excellence, and therefore muſt be perfect and faultleſs. We may take up this matter in a very ſimple, and at the ſame time clear and conſpicuous point of view. The ſum of the moral law is, "Thou ſhalt love," &c. The whole is con-

tained under these heads, especially the first of them, from which the other is a corollary. Is there any thing more manifestly reasonable, than that we should love supremely what is supremely excellent? or where is the rival, that can plead a better title to our affection? If he hath commanded us to love what was not amiable, or to do what was not reasonable, there would have been ground for complaint. If we take the sense of the second table by itself, we shall see the same thing very plainly, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" or, which is the same thing, "Whatsoever ye would that men do unto you, do ye the same unto them." Is this unreasonable? Is any man's reason so perverted, or his conscience so depraved, as to complain of this, as an unjust or oppressive law? There are some who talk upon this subject in such a manner as we may truly say of them, with the apostle, "They speak of the law, and know neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" and they will say, Our Saviour has made merciful abatements of the law. Pray, has he made any abatement of the love of God, and of our neighbour? Would you be satisfied to hear any man trace out a system of moral duty, and make any alteration in these? Yet they are the whole in substance; wherever these are, every thing will follow of course. If you love God supremely, and your neighbour as yourself, you will neglect no duty to the one or to the other.

When I am upon this branch of the subject, the reasonableness of God's commands, it will be proper to obviate an apparent, and at the same time

an important objection. You will perhaps say, To keep the commands of God, is above our power. Have not you yourself often taught us, that no mere man in this life is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? 'Can that be reasonable, then, that is impossible?' Now consider, I pray you, what sort of impossibility this is. It is not natural, but moral. It is not want of power, but want of inclination. Nothing is required of us that is unsuitable to our situation, or above our natural powers; so far from it, that even what was our duty before, if by any accident it becomes impossible in this sense, it ceases to be a duty. God no where commands you to be taller or stronger than he has made you: and though he commands you to labour, working with your hands, if he confines you with sickness, this duty no longer binds. He has given you faculties and natural powers for every thing that he requires. Are not all your powers, both of mind and body, as fit for your Maker's service as for any other purpose? Is not the tongue as fit to speak truth as falsehood: and every member of the body as fit to do what is lawful or useful, as what is sinful or hurtful? The commands of God, then, are neither impossible nor difficult to those who are willing to obey them. No man can say with truth, that he desired with all his heart to do his Maker's will, and could not. But perhaps some will say, 'This indisposition itself, is my nature, I cannot help it.' If any think this excuse may be offered to God, let him first make trial of offering it to his fellow-creature, or suppose another to offer it to himself. Suppose you should complain

of another, for ſtealing your ſubſtance, or blaſting your name, or otherwiſe injuring you; and that he ſhould anſwer, that he could not help it. What! you would ſay, you could not help it! what neceſſity obliged you? Why, ſays he, it was my nature, becauſe I hate you, and it grieves me to ſee you proſper. Would that be accepted as an excuſe? I think not; for it is the very eſſence of the injury. On the whole, it plainly appears, that the commands of God are all reaſonable and juſt; neither can they ſuffer any abatement, without infringing upon the holineſs of his own nature, and the wiſdom and equity of his government itſelf.

3. The Redeemer's yoke is eaſy, and his burden light, becauſe all his commands have an immediate and direct tendency to promote our own comfort and happineſs. They are not leſs reaſonable as they expreſs the right of the Creator, than they are gracious as they are calculated to promote the intereſt of the creature. I do not mean here, only or chiefly, the great reward which he hath in mercy provided and promiſed to thoſe that keep them, but that in their own nature they are fitted to promote our happineſs.

I have before ſufficiently taken notice, that we are not to underſtand, by keeping the commands of God, a conſtrained outward obedience, without the inclination of the heart. Conſtrained obedience, I confeſs, is neither acceptable to God, nor delightful to man. But when the ſervice of God is choſen from the heart, it is both delightful and profitable in all reſpects. If we examine the matter with care, we ſhall find, that true religion conſiſts in the ex-

ercise of the most noble and grateful affections of mind, or rather the one leading disposition, which, when rightly directed as to its object, makes the sum of religion, and is also the source of felicity. It is love, supreme love to God, and, through him and for him, to all his creatures, that is the sum of religion; and must not every body be sensible, that this is a temper and frame of mind much more desirable than its opposite? Carry the one and the other through all their branches and expressions, and see if they will bear the comparison. From love spring thankfulness, contentment, submission, benevolence, beneficence, meekness, compassion, forgiveness; and from hatred spring ambition, rage, impatience, malevolence, envy, revenge, and cruelty. If there were no law of God at all, which of those tribes of affections is more desirable of itself, or most conducive to our inward comfort and peace?

If we try this matter by experience, let us ask the children of God, whether they have found his service burdensome? whether they would exchange a meek, thankful, and contented frame of spirit, for the storms of rage, envy, or ambition? Do they look with a jealous or envious eye on the liberty of wicked men? on the contrary, they would not exchange with any of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. Perhaps, though there is great blindness in the understanding itself, of wicked men, we may learn the truth even from their experience and confessions. We many times hear them acknowledge their bondage; and when they do not explicitly acknowledge it, yet it is easy to perceive it. You never hear a bad man taking

comfort to himſelf from the evil he has done, but ſometimes comparatively from the greater evil that he has not done. Without going particularly through every minute circumſtance, let us juſt ſay in general, that whether we conſider the inward temper, or the outward practice, our relations, buſineſs, and enjoyments in life, or hope for futurity, we cannot in any inſtance depart from the commandments of God, without at the ſame time acting contrary to our own manifeſt intereſt: ſo that Wiſdom ſays with great truth and juſtice, Prov. viii. 36. "He that ſinneth againſt me, wrongeth his own ſoul: all they that hate me, love death."

4. The Redeemer's yoke is eaſy, and his burden light, becauſe he has given the moſt free and gracious invitation to ſinners to return to God. By his ſufferings he purchaſed their pardon, and is inveſted with full authority to negotiate peace. "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved him to ſuffer, that repentance and remiſſion of ſins," &c. What we are particularly to remember upon this ſubject is, that the invitation is, without reſerve or exception, to all of every character, however deep and aggravated their offences: Iſ. i. 18. "Come now, and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord: though your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white as ſnow; though they be red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool." 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave ſinners; of whom I am chief." The offer is alſo free as to the terms, without any coſtly or meriting condition: Iſa. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirſt-

eth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Rev. xxii. 17. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Can there be any thing more encouraging than these gracious invitations? Here it is that we ought to take in the wise and happy constitution of the Redeemer's person, as the son of man, as well as the Son of God, and the meekness and gentleness of his disposition. This was prophesied of him of old, Isa. xlii. 1, 2, 3. "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break; and the smoaking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgement unto truth." This was beautifully and admirably fulfilled by his appearance in the flesh, by the meanness of his birth, though not of his parentage, by the poverty and self-denial of his life, by the meekness and lowliness of his carriage, not only through life, but in the last and suffering stage of it; for he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; when he was reviled, he reviled not again. So that he might with the greatest justice say as in the context, "Take my yoke."

5. The Redeemer's yoke is easy, and his burden light, because he hath made abundant provision of divine strength, to enable us to keep his command-

ments. How gracious theſe laws, when the Lawgiver communicates ſtrength for performance? This takes away all objection, and removes every difficulty. What is impoſſible with man, is poſſible with God. There is no heart ſo hard, but Omnipotence is able to ſoften it; no temper ſo depraved, but the Creator is able to renew it. The converſion of a ſinner is always conſidered in ſcripture as the work of God: "God, who at firſt commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs," &c. The promiſe of the new covenant is thus deſcribed by Ezekiel, xxxvi. 25. "Then will I ſprinkle clean water upon you, and ye ſhall be clean: from all your filthineſs, and from all your idols, will I cleanſe you." And in the New Teſtament, faith which unites us to Chriſt, and every other good diſpoſition, is repreſented as the gift of God: Eph. ii. 8. "For by grace ye are ſaved, through faith; and that not of yourſelves: it is the gift of God."

And as the converſion of ſinners, ſo the daily growth of the ſpiritual life in believers, is to be imputed entirely to the ſame cauſe; for this end it was, that it pleaſed the Father that all fulneſs ſhould dwell in Chriſt; and we have this teſtimony from the apoſtle John, i. 16. "And of his fulneſs have all we received, and grace for grace."

SERMON XIII.

THE GLORY OF THE REDEEMER IN THE PERPETUITY OF HIS WORK.

PSALM lxxii. 17.

His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

ACTION SERMON.

MY BRETHREN,

THE whole syſtem of providence and grace was fixed in the eternal purpoſe of God, before the foundation of the world. Hence he is repreſented, Iſ. xlvi. 10. as "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, ſaying, My counſel ſhall ſtand, and I will do all my pleaſure." The writings of the Old Teſtament give us the hiſtory of the ſeveral openings of this plan, during that diſpenſation, in which we may obſerve almoſt continual references to the appearance of an illuſtrious perſon, at a certain important period, called "the fulneſs of time."

The appearance of the Saviour in our nature, including his obedience, his ſufferings and death, his triumphant reſurrection and aſcenſion, was an event ſo aſtoniſhing in itſelf, and ſo great in its effects, as being the means appointed of God for the redemption of a loſt world, that we need not be ſurpriſed at the care taken in the Old-Teſtament church, to keep it always in view. It was natural for holy and good men, who had ſo many intimations given them of it, to think on it with pleaſure, and when they were led to ſpeak of future times, to bring in this remarkable period, and mention it with rapture. And when God inſpired his ſervants to propheſy of the proſperity and happineſs of his church and kingdom, he could not fail to raiſe their deſcriptions, and lead them to give ſuch views of things as were ſuitable to that great event, which was to be ſuch a ſignal illuſtration of his glorious goodneſs, and ſo great a bleſſing to mankind.

Hence it is, that we find ſeveral propheſies begun, in appearance, to celebrate ſome public bleſſing, at or near the times in which they were delivered, gradually ſo heightened by ſeveral expreſſions, as we may perceive that in their full extent they could only relate to the times of the Meſſiah. Such, for inſtance, is that in my text: for if we lay together the accounts we have of Solomon, in ſcripture, and the felicity of his reign; if we remember the ſcandalous ſteps he made in the latter part of his life, the dreadful rent that happened in the reign of his ſon and immediate ſucceſſor; and that, after the courſe of a few ages, Judah was carried into captivity, we muſt be ſenſible, that the expreſſions

in the text are by far too much exalted, if nothing elſe was intended by them. But if we conſider them as relating to Meſſiah the Prince, then we ſee every thing literally fulfilled to the utmoſt import and extent of the prophetic language. "His name ſhall endure for ever: his name ſhall be continued as long as the ſun; and men ſhall be bleſſed in him: all nations ſhall call him bleſſed."

It is below the majeſty of the ſcriptures, to make uſe of ſtrong and lofty expreſſions to denote a very common and ordinary event, to which they cannot be applied without making great abatements. This is a fault men often fall into; but it would be very unjuſt to impute it to perſons ſpeaking under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God. We may therefore lay it down as one good rule for underſtanding the prophetic writings, that whenever they riſe far above the ſubject they were treating of, into expreſſions literally applicable to the Meſſiah, and which, in their full extent, can belong to none but him, he is to be conſidered as chiefly in the view of the Spirit of God. Now, this being the caſe with my text, as I hope appears ſufficiently from what has been already ſaid, I ſhall conſider it as a noble and animated prophecy of the glory of his reign; which will be the more proper introduction to this day's work, as what we are now to be employed about is an eminent part of its accompliſhment.

In diſcourſing further on it at preſent, I ſhall circumſcribe the ſubject, and only,

I. Endeavour to open the import of this magnificent declaration, as underſtood of Chriſt. "His name ſhall endure for ever," &c.

II. Make some practical improvement of the subject, for your instruction and assistance in the present duty.

I. THEN, let us endeavour to open the import of this magnificent declaration as understood of Christ, "His name shall endure for ever," &c. And, in the *first* place, It carries in it an assurance of the greatness of his power as a Saviour, and the perfect security of all those who put their trust in him. The word *name* often signifies the excellence or perfection of the person named or referred to. This is especially the case in scripture, with respect to God, where his name is just his glory and all-sufficiency revealed. The name of the Lord is in many passages of equivalent meaning with the power of God: thus, Prov. xviii. 10. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Psalm xx. 1. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee." This may with the greater propriety be applied to Christ, that you may know the name of Jesus, was by the express appointment of the angel of the Lord, given to him at his birth, to denote the great deliverance he was to work for sinners, in saving them from their sins. This is the great errand on which the Son of God came into the world, 1 Tim. i. 15. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The success he should have in this work is often celebrated; as Isaiah liii. 10. 11. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he

hath put him to grief: when thou ſhall make his ſoul an offering for ſin, he ſhall ſee his ſeed, he ſhall prolong his days, and the pleaſure of the Lord ſhall proſper in his hand. He ſhall ſee of the travail of his ſoul, and ſhall be ſatisfied; by his knowledge ſhall my righteous ſervant juſtify many; for he ſhall bear their iniquities." His power as a Saviour, to break the chains of Satan, and to deliver the captive ſoul, is frequently declared in the ſtrongeſt terms; as If. xlii. 6. 7. 8. "I the Lord have called thee in righteouſneſs, and I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the priſoners from the priſon, and them that ſit in darkneſs out of the priſon-houſe. I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praiſe to graven images." Iſaiah, lxiii. 1. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatneſs of his ſtrength? I that ſpeak in righteouſneſs, mighty to ſave." This power of Chriſt to ſave, ſeems to be plainly called his name, 1 John, iii. 23. "And this is his commandment, that we ſhould believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Thus it is reaſonable to think, that the power of Chriſt as a Saviour is celebrated in our text, as what would ever remain a ſure and plentiful ſource of ſalvation to mankind, and be ever depended upon and acknowledged as ſuch by all the redeemed.

This glory of Chriſt's name as a Saviour, has a par-

ticular reſpect to the wretched and deplorable ſtate of thoſe who are the objects of his mercy, and that there are none beyond the reach of his power; that there is none ſo loaded with guilt, or ſo ſtained with pollution, but he is able to purchaſe their pardon, and to effect their deliverance. Perſons, you know, inflicted with inveterate and dangerous diſeaſes, are apt to hearken with eagerneſs to the name of an eminent phyſician, from whoſe ſkill they may entertain ſome hopes of recovery, and the greater and more illuſtrious his name is, they are apt to place the greater confidence in him. So when we hear that Chriſt's name ſhall endure for ever, it ſhould encourage ſinners of whatever rank to fly to him, and to put their truſt in him. God reaſons thus in illuſtrating his own mercy, If. i. 18. 19. "Come now, and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord; though your ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white as ſnow; though they be red like crimſon, they ſhall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye ſhall eat the good of the land." And to the ſame purpoſe, If. lv. 7. "Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But he hath given us ſtill greater encouragement, by committing the work of our ſalvation to ſo glorious a perſon, in whoſe hand it cannot fail, Pſalm lxxxix. 18. 19. "For the Lord is our defence; and the Holy One of Iſrael is our King. Then thou ſpeakeſt in viſion to thy Holy One, and ſaidſt, I have laid help upon one that is mighty: I have exalted one choſen out of the

people." If. ix. 6. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a ſon is given, and the government ſhall be upon his ſhoulder; and his name ſhall be called Wonderful, Counſellor, The Mighty God, The Everlaſting Father, The Prince of Peace." Not to inſiſt on the many paſſages in the New Teſtament, which point our attention to the power and dignity of Chriſt, I ſhall only mention, Heb. vii. 25. "Wherefore he is able alſo to ſave them to the uttermoſt that come unto God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them."

I ſhall only further ſay, that the glory of Chriſt's name, as an almighty Saviour, may be conſidered in its ſuperior luſtre to every thing that might be ſuppoſed to come in competition with him, or pretend to be put in his place. This is certainly the meaning of a great name, when applied to men. He is ſaid to obtain the greateſt name, who outſtrips or eclipſes others by the glory of his deeds; the fame muſt be the meaning of this paſſage, as applied to our Redeemer: "His name ſhall endure for ever." The names of others ſhall ſoon be loſt. Their inferior brightneſs will ſoon decay: but his ſhall continue for ever with unfading and increaſing luſtre.

This, my brethren, is a circumſtance that ought never to be omitted. We cannot honour Chriſt as an almighty Saviour, unleſs we believe and remember that he is the only Saviour. There are ſome paſſages in the prophetic writings, in which God aſſerts his own incommunicable glory, in oppoſition to the vanities of the Gentiles, and that in language inimitably ſtrong: Iſa. xl. 17. 18. "All nations

before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him leſs than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeneſs will ye compare unto him?" Iſa. xliii. 10. 11. 12. 13. "Ye are my witneſſes, ſaith the Lord, and my ſervant, whom I have choſen: that ye may know and believe me, and underſtand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither ſhall there be after me. I, even I am the Lord, and beſide me there is no Saviour. I have declared, and have ſaved, and I have ſhewed, when there was no ſtrange god among you: therefore ye are my witneſſes, ſaith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who ſhall let it?" Hoſea, xiii. 4. "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou ſhalt know no God but me: for there is no ſaviour beſide me." The ſame peculiar and excluſive honour belongs to Chriſt, as the hope of ſinners: Acts, iv. 12. "Neither is there ſalvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we muſt be ſaved."

I might illuſtrate this ſenſe of the paſſage before us, by ſhewing you that all the rites and ceremonies of the ancient diſpenſation derived their efficacy from their relation to Chriſt. But I ſhall only tell you, that all the dependance which you place in any thing elſe for your acceptance with God, is an injury to the honour of your Redeemer; that all ſelf-righteouſneſs and ſelf-dependance, to which there is in man by nature ſo ſtrong a tendency, obſcures the luſtre of that name which ſhall endure

for ever; that as he is able to save sinners to the uttermost, so they shall never obtain salvation, but by him. As it is he who laid the foundation of this great work, who carries it on through all the steps of its progress, and at last brings it to perfection, so he will have (and why should he not have?) the undivided glory.

This leads me to observe, that the magnificent declaration in the text concerning Christ, implies the immortal honour and renown which he would acquire by the work of man's redemption. Every one knows that, in scripture-style, to get a name is to acquire renown and glory, by some illustrious atchievement; as, 2 Sam. viii. 13. "And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting the Syrians in the Valley of Salt, being eighteen thousand men."

And surely, my brethren, the undertaking of Christ was the most glorious in itself, the most arduous in its accomplishment, the most blessed in its effects, and the most generous and disinterested in him, that can possibly be conceived. Think on this part of the subject, I beseech you, with attention; and weigh the intimations we have of it in scripture. And for this purpose observe, that he acquired glory with God, with angels, and with men.

(1) As the salvation of sinners was a work in which the glory of God the Father was eminently illustrated, so he is represented as looking with the highest complacency on Christ, in the undertaking and accomplishment of it. Thus, Matth. iii. 17. "And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is

my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed." And again, at his transfiguration, Matth. xvii. 5. "While he yet ſpake, behold a bright cloud overſhadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which ſaid, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed; hear ye him." Iſa. xlii. 1. "Behold my ſervant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my ſoul delighteth: I have put my ſpirit upon him, he ſhall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles." We ſee alſo, that God is repreſented as having put the higheſt honour on the Redeemer, in reward of his ſufferings: Phil. ii. 9. 10. 11. "Wherefore God hath alſo highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue ſhould confeſs that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Heb. ii. 9. "But we ſee Jeſus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the ſufferings of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God ſhould taſte death for every man." See alſo Heb. xii. 2. "Looking unto Jeſus, the author and finiſher of our faith; who, for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the throne of God."

I am ſenſible, my brethren, that this delight and approbation, which the Father is repreſented as expreſſing in the undertaking of the Son, is a ſubject of the moſt elevated nature, on which we ought to think and ſpeak with the utmoſt veneration, and with the greateſt reſerve. But ſince he hath re-

vealed, it is our duty to improve it. Does it not carry your thoughts naturally to that expreſſion we find uſed in ſcripture, at the finiſhing of the material creation, mentioned at the end of every day's work, and repeated on a review of the whole, Gen. i. 31. "And God ſaw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

We muſt needs conceive the omnipotent Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, as poſſeſſed, not only of abſolute and unchangeable perfection, but of infinite and inconceivable felicity. And may we not, muſt we not conceive, that this felicity conſiſts both in the contemplation and exerciſe of all his glorious attributes, and in nothing more than in the redemption of ſinners, in which his power, wiſdom, holineſs, juſtice, and mercy, are ſeverally and jointly ſo conſpicuouſly diſplayed? Nay, may we not venture, with reverence, further to ſay, that the three perſons in the Trinity, by their diſtinct properties, and peculiar agency, receive and impart everlaſting delight to one another, in their ineffable communion? The eternal Word is repreſented as ſaying, Prov. viii. 30. "Then was I by him as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

(2.) The Redeemer acquired immortal renown among the angels, and the whole celeſtial hoſt. This we may ſpeak of with abundance of certainty, and with yet clearer comprehenſion. Doubtleſs their happineſs conſiſts in the viſion and contemplation of an infinite God. And therefore the manifeſtation and exerciſe of the divine perfections, both in providence and grace, adminiſter to them matter

of continual and increasing delight. There is a beautiful representation of their employment, Is. vi. 1. 2. 3. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Now, there is no reason to doubt that the work of redemption, in all its parts, in which they themselves have an inferior employment, as ministering spirits, under the dominion of the uncreated Angel of the covenant, must be a source of the purest felicity, and a subject of the most elevated praise; in a particular manner, the assumption of our nature into a personal union with the divine. You see how they sing praises at the birth of the Saviour, Luke ii. 13. 14. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men."

The humiliation, sufferings, and death of God's eternal Son, his victory upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and triumph over principalities and powers, that is to say, the revolted angels, must have often laid these servants of the living God prostrate in adoration. This is not a matter of conjecture, but clearly revealed; the whole plan of redemption being called a mystery, which the angels desire to penetrate, 1 Peter, 10. 11. 12. "Of

which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow: unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

Realize these great truths to yourselves, my brethren. What think you were the views of the innumerable hosts of cherubim and seraphim, when some of them conducted the ascending Saviour, and others received him, when he entered within the veil? What think you were their views when they beheld the Mediator, God-man, exalted at the right hand of God, and had a new object of adoration, bearing the scars of his sufferings, and known by the print of the nails, and by his bleeding temples? Heb. i. 6. "And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Or, when they saw the dominion and power with which he was invested as King of kings, and Lord of lords, 1 Peter, iii. 22. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him."

This renown of the Saviour must have been much greater among them, if it is true what many

intelligent divines have ſuppoſed, that by the ſame glorious undertaking by which he redeemed elect ſinners, he eſtabliſhed and confirmed the obedient angels in a ſtate of holineſs and happineſs. I ſhall only further ſay, that we are expreſsly told, the adminiſtration of divine grace, or the government and preſervation of the church of Chriſt, is a continued illuſtration, to the ſpirits above, of his Father's wiſdom: Eph. iii. 10. "To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wiſdom of God." Agreeably to this, we find that in the book of Revelation, which opens the great ſcenes of providence to the church militant, there are ſeveral viſions in which the angels are repreſented as uniting their praiſes with redeemed ſinners, and directing their worſhip to the ſame great object. This leads me to obſerve,

(3.) That the Saviour acquired immortal renown among ſinners of mankind. If the angels, who were either ſpectators only, or at moſt but partial ſharers in redeeming grace, do yet hold him in the higheſt honour, what is, and muſt be, the ſenſe of gratitude which dwells in the heart of a pardoned ſinner? O, my brethren, how many circumſtances concur to bind the heart of the believer in eternal bonds of gratitude to Chriſt! Who can conceive or expreſs the debt of the ſinner to the Saviour! He is redeemed from everlaſting deſtruction, he is ſaved from wrath through him. Whoever is humbled, through fear of the vengeance of a holy and jealous God, what fervent love will he bear to him, who hath wrought his deliverance, who hath pur-

chaſed his pardon! If he is filled with a deep ſenſe of his own unworthineſs, of his aggravated and inexcuſeable provocations, with what rapture muſt he look upon that Saviour, who forgave him graciouſly, and loved him freely? Who is not moved with that inimitable picture of penitent love, when Mary Magdalene came in, as it is related, Luke, vii. 37. 38. "And, behold, a woman in the city, who was a ſinner, when ſhe knew that Jeſus ſat at meat in the Phariſee's houſe, brought an alabaſter-box of ointment, and ſtood at his feet behind him, weeping, and began to waſh his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kiſſed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." And how juſt and proper that reflection of our Saviour, in the 47th verſe, "Wherefore, I ſay unto thee, Her ſins, which are many, are forgiven; for ſhe loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the ſame loveth little." The believer's eſteem and gratitude muſt be greatly increaſed, by conſidering the unſpeakable coſt at which his deliverance was bought, the amazing and affecting ſufferings which the Redeemer endured in his room. When he follows the patient and immaculate Saviour, by the eye of faith, from his inward anguiſh in the garden, to his ſhameful ſufferings on the accurſed tree—with what relenting of heart will he view that bleſſed head crowned with thorns, that ſacred body nailed to the croſs! And when he carries forward his views to the glory and happineſs prepared for him, in the Redeemer's preſence above, what is the ſum of his obligations? What bounds can be ſet to this conqueror's renown? In

what better way can we expreſs this than by repeating and adopting theſe animating ſongs of praiſe, which are now making a great part of the worſhip of Heaven? Rev. v. 11.—14. "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beaſts, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thouſand times ten thouſand, and thouſands of thouſands; ſaying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was ſlain to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and ſtrength, and honour, and glory, and bleſſing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and ſuch as are in the ſea, and all that are in them, heard I ſaying, Bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. And the four beaſts ſaid, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worſhipped him that liveth for ever and ever."—And Rev. vii. 9. 10. 11.

3. In the laſt place, the magnificent declaration concerning Chriſt in the text, implies the ſtability and perpetuity of his kingdom. The glorious promiſes made to the houſe and family of David, have their chief and full accompliſhment in Chriſt the ſon of David. The earthly kingdom erected in that family has long ago been deſtroyed; but the Redeemer's ſpiritual kingdom is an everlaſting kingdom, and his dominion ſhall have no end. This was the promiſe of the Father to the Meſſiah, Pſal. lxxxix. 36. 37. "His ſeed ſhall endure for ever, and his throne as the ſun before me. It ſhall

be eſtabliſhed for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witneſs in heaven. Selah."

It is one great end of the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper, to perpetuate the Redeemer's name: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do ſhew forth the Lord's death till he come;" and it is a noble and reviving object of faith, that we know that his kingdom ſhall ſtand faſt for ever. Hell itſelf may rage, and the princes of this world may combine to ſhake his glorious throne; but he that ſits in heaven ſhall laugh, the King of Zion ſhall hold their impotent attempts in deriſion. He ſhall maintain his intereſt in ſpite of all the efforts of his numerous and inveterate enemies. He hath often done ſo already, and ſhall continue to do ſo till the end of time, Rev. xvii. 14.

I PROCEED now to make ſome practical application of what hath been ſaid. And,

1. Let us adore the wiſdom and the power of Chriſt.

My brethren, when we conſider the ſimplicity of the goſpel, and the ſcandal of the croſs; when we conſider the whole ſyſtem of the doctrine according to godlineſs, and ſalvation by grace, how directly contrary it is to the pride of our nature, how many attempts have been, and continue to be made in every age, to ſuppreſs it by violence, to blacken it by ſlander, and to adulterate it by mixture; it is a ſtanding miracle that it has been able to hold its ground. Whoever will reflect either upon the preſent ſtate, or the paſt hiſtory of the church of Chriſt, muſt be obliged to ſay, that our

faith does not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God. I muſt not omit to ſay, that we are perhaps as much indebted, in this nation, to the goodneſs of Providence in this reſpect, as any corner of the earth; and I cannot but be pleaſed with the choice which our fathers made, of an emblem and motto for the church of Scotland, a buſh burning, but not conſumed. Let us rejoice in the faith, that the Prince of the kings of the earth, who hath hitherto maintained his truths and intereſt againſt all the power and cunning of earthly policy, will continue to preſerve them, and that "his name ſhall endure for ever: his name ſhall be continued as long as the ſun; and men ſhall be bleſſed in him: all nations ſhall call him bleſſed."

2. You may learn from what hath been ſaid, the guilt and danger of the enemies of Chriſt; of all thoſe who ſet light by the glory of his perſon, and are unwilling to be indebted to the riches of his grace. I would willingly aſpire to the character which the apoſtle Paul aſſumes to himſelf, 2 Cor. ii. 17. "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of ſincerity, but as of God, in the ſight of God ſpeak we in Chriſt." Chriſt is the only foundation of a ſinner's hope: 1 Cor. iii. 11. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt." There may be a form of godlineſs, nay, there may be an oſtentatious parade of human virtue, but there can be nothing of the ſpirit and power of true religion, without a clear diſcovery and ſincere confeſſion of our loſt and depraved ſtate by nature, without a believing application to the mercy of God, through the blood

of the atonement. Think not, I beſeech you, to fruſtrate the word of God. The following teſtimony comes from the Amen, the true and faithful Witneſs, John, xiv. 6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." If ſo great honour is put upon the Redeemer by God the Father, and by his holy angels, how unſpeakably dangerous muſt it be for ſinners to deſpiſe him. You can never deſpiſe this ordinance of God for ſalvation, but from the greateſt ignorance of yourſelves. My heart bleeds to think of the deluſion of the deſpiſers of the goſpel. What views can you have of the immaculate nature and holy law of God, if you truſt in yourſelves that you are righteous? What experience have you of the ſtability of theſe reſolutions that have been taken as in your ſtrength? How weak and defective is that virtue which is founded only on human prudence, or motives of preſent conveniency? One believing view of a Saviour on the croſs, will have a more powerful influence in mortifying corruptions, than all other arguments whatever. One fervent prayer, urged in the name of Chriſt, will be more effectual for your preſervation, than a thouſand merely human reſolutions.—Obey this ſalutary counſel, John, xv. 4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

3. From what has been ſaid, let me beſeech you to try your title to ſit down at the Lord's table. This ordinance was expreſsly inſtituted for putting honour on the Redeemer's name. He is the ſum

and ſubſtance of it; his death and ſufferings are the immediate ſubject of it. Have you, then, my brethren, a high and inward eſteem of his perſon; a deep ſenſe of gratitude for his mercy; an entire and unſhaken reliance on his grace and power? Can you call the Searcher of hearts to witneſs, that you unfeignedly approve of this way of ſalvation, by which God is glorified, and the ſinner abaſed? Are you not aſhamed to profeſs it? And while others are ready to deſpiſe it, are you willing to glory in it? Does it pleaſe you to hear that the Saviour's name ſhall endure for ever? Is it with holy triumph you reflect, that the glory of his kingdom ſhall be unchangeable, and his power to eternity itſelf? If this is your diſpoſition, I hope you will come with acceptance to his table; and I would flatter myſelf with the pleaſing expectation, that many of this day's worſhippers ſhall be everlaſting monuments of their Redeemer's power; that they ſhall be happy ſubjects of his grace, and taſte of the conſolations of his goſpel on earth, and be heirs and partakers of his glory in heaven.

4. I would improve this ſubject, by earneſtly beſeeching every ſinner to embrace this ſalvation, and enliſt himſelf under the banner of this renowned Saviour. There are, no doubt, many within theſe walls who are ſtill in the gall of bitterneſs, and in the bond of iniquity. O that the Redeemer would glorify his own power in their conviction and their ſalvation! "Gird on thy ſword upon thy thigh, O Moſt Mighty!" Are there not ſome in this aſſembly who are ſenſible that they are lying under a load of unforgiven guilt; that they are ſtill ſlaves

to habitual ſin? Does not the very ſacred action we are going about, fill you with fear that you are far from the ſtate and temper of God's children? Is not the old nature ſo ſtrong in you, that you have good reaſon to ſuſpect you have never yet put on the new? Let me beſeech and exhort you, to believe in the name of the Son of God. His merit is of infinite value; his power is of infinite efficacy. Many notorious ſinners have been, from age to age, the happy witneſſes of both. Nothing in your condition ought to be a diſcouragement to you from applying to this all-ſufficient Saviour; he invites you by me, or rather I invite you by his commiſſion, and in his own terms, Matth. xi. 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt." Iſa. lv. 1. "Ho, every one that thirſteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." John, vi. 37. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wiſe caſt out." How ſhall I urge your compliance? is not this name ſo powerful that you may ſafely put your truſt in it? Are you not deſirous that your converſion to God ſhould illuſtrate it, and make it glorious? I ſhall leave the matter with you after making this remark, that in vain do his enemies oppoſe him; in vain do ſinners deſpiſe him. He is getting him a name by the preaching of the goſpel. It is ſtill ſerving its purpoſe, for the calling and confirmation of the veſſels of mercy, for aggravating the guilt and increaſing the condemnation of the obſtinate and diſobedient: Luke, xx. 17. 18. "And he beheld them, and ſaid,

What is this, then, that is written, The ſtone which the builders rejected, the ſame is become the head of the corner? Whoſoever ſhall fall upon that ſtone ſhall be broken; but on whomſoever it ſhall fall, it will grind him to powder."

In the *laſt* place, You may learn from what hath been ſaid, the wiſdom of God, in the inſtitution of the Lord's ſupper, and what ought to be your employment at his table. How wiſely fitted is this ordinance to keep up the remembrance of Chriſt as a Saviour, as a ſuffering dying Saviour. Perhaps no one circumſtance has contributed more to preſerve the pure uncorrupted doctrine of the goſpel, than the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper. It ſets the truth before our eyes, while the words of the inſtitution repeats it in our ears, 1 Cor. xi. 24. "This is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me." And verſe 25th, "This cup is the new teſtament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Profeſſing Chriſtians, but of worldly minds, may be aſhamed of the croſs; ſelf-righteous perſons may put ſomething elſe in the room of the croſs; perverſe diſputers may oppoſe it, or keep it out of their writings; and erroneous teachers may keep it out of their ſermons; but there is no keeping it out of the ſacrament of his ſupper. Under this auſpicious banner, the name of Chriſt has been ſpread to the moſt diſtant nations, and handed down from the moſt diſtant ages; and ſo it ſhall continue till he come again, "for as often as ye eat this bread," &c. How, then, ought you to be employed, in a thankful and joyful acceptance of ſalvation through

his blood, in the lively exercise of faith in his power, in deriving from his fulness every thing necessary for your support under temptation or trial; and in fervent prayer, that his name may be hallowed, his kingdom may come, and his will may be done in earth, as it is in heaven.—Amen, and amen.

SERMON XIV.

THE PETITIONS OF THE INSINCERE UNAVAILING.

PSALM lxvi. 18.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

MY BRETHREN,

THERE is not, I think, a more ſtriking light in which we can conſider an aſſembly of profeſſing Chriſtians, than as united in their common relation to God, and upon an equal footing as to outward privileges, but very different as to their inward character. This difference ſhall only be completely manifeſted in the final deciſion of their ſtate at the laſt day. The mixture of ſaints and ſinners muſt continue till that time, when there ſhall be an eternal ſeparation of the precious from the vile, of the ſheep from the goats. Muſt, then, all things continue in ſuſpence and uncertainty till the great day? Is there no way by which we can judge, at preſent, what will be the event at that intereſting period?

What is now the inward temper, or the ſpiritual ſtate, and what ſhall be the eternal condition of every perſon here preſent, is perfectly known to God, the ſearcher of all hearts. It cannot be known indeed, with any certainty, by his fellow-ſinners, but it may be known in a great meaſure by every one with regard to himſelf. It may be known with ſuch a degree of evidence as to deliver him from diſtreſſing anxiety, and even to fill him with the moſt joyful hope and expectation. Is not this ſufficient? and ought it not to excite every one of us to a ſerious and impartial trial of that great queſtion, in which we have no leſs than an infinite concern? This ought to be our care, in a particular manner, when we have in view to make a near and ſolemn approach to God, in his ſanctuary on earth, becauſe his acceptance of our worſhip in the body is an earneſt and pledge of his final approbation, as appears from the words of the text, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;" and likewiſe from another paſſage, John, ix. 31. "Now, we know that God heareth not ſinners: but if any man be a worſhipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."

This pſalm was compoſed, in all probability, by the pſalmiſt David; though ſome are of a contrary opinion, and attribute it to one of the prophets, after the captivity. The inſpired author celebrates the goodneſs of God in ſome ſignal and national deliverance, and, towards the cloſe of the pſalm, takes particular notice of the diſtinguiſhing kindneſs of God to himſelf, as in Pſal. lxvi. 16. "Come and

hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my ſoul." He then conſiders the countenance and acceptance he had met with from God, as an evidence of his own ſincerity, in the 18th & 19th verſes, " If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me; but verily God hath heard me;" he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. I cannot at this time take in the whole compaſs of this ſubject, or conſider how the one of theſe aſſertions is related to the other; but as the firſt of them contains an intereſting truth in itſelf, and very proper for the trial of our ſtate, I ſhall endeavour, through divine aſſiſtance, to illuſtrate it in the following method.

I. I ſhall conſider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart.

II. What is to be underſtood by God's not hearing ſuch perſons. And,

III. I ſhall make ſome practical improvement of the ſubject, for your inſtruction and direction.

In the *firſt* place, then, Let us conſider what is implied in regarding iniquity in the heart. And I think it is plain, that theſe words do not directly point at open, ſcandalous, and profane ſinners, who have burſt every bond, and look with diſdain and defiance in the face of every reprover. There are too many of this character, my brethren, who fall under the deſcription of the prophet Jeremiah, ch. xliv. ver. 16. and firſt clauſe of the 17th, and who practically ſay, " As for the word that thou haſt ſpoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly

do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." To these I shall speak in the application of the subject, as there is no doubt that they regard iniquity in the heart, since they openly and obstinately practise it in the life. But certainly the words of the text do chiefly relate to those whose characters are more doubtful, both to others and to themselves. Many there have been in every age, and there are many amongst us, who maintain their character before men; but when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, shall be found wanting; but at the same time, by the power of self-deceit, they are ready to say, they shall have peace, though they walk after the imagination of their own hearts. For undeceiving all such persons, and for the trial of others, that they that are approved may be made manifest, let me beseech your attention to the following particulars.

1. They regard iniquity in their hearts, who practise it secretly, who are under restraint from the world, but are not possessed of an habitual fear of the omniscient God, the searcher of all hearts, and from whose eyes there is no covering of thick darkness where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves: Jer. xxiii. 24. "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." If you remember in what manner I stated the general meaning of the words, you will be sensible that I do not here chiefly point at gross hypocrisy, or those who under the cloak of religion practise all manner of wickedness in their secret retirement. There are many others on whose con-

duct the judgement of men has a ſtrong, though at the ſame time an inſenſible effect, who are perhaps regular and guarded in their viſible deportment, but on whom a ſenſe of the continual preſence of the inviſible God, with whom they have to do, hath not a commanding and habitual influence. It is a dangerous ſymptom of this, when your repentance is very ſlight, and you eaſily forgive yourſelves for thoſe ſins of which the world is ignorant, or in thoſe that are known, when you remember the ſhame longer than the ſin.

How many unhappy examples of this do we ſee every day! How many can go very eaſily under their ſins that are known only to God, but are filled with vexation when they have been betrayed into what expoſes them to the cenſure of their fellow-creatures. There are ſome who ſeem to be much more affected with the cenſure of others for trifling errors, than the diſpleaſure of God for heinous ſins. Nay, there are to be found ſome who evidently ſuffer more uneaſineſs from the cenſure of others, even where it is wrong, than from frequent neglects or breaches of the law of God. Now, what ſignifies the opinion of others, when it is founded on miſtake, or malice? I do not mean, my brethren, to extinguiſh, or bid you endeavour to extinguiſh, a ſenſe of ſhame; but let it be ſubordinate to the fear of God. The diſtreſs of a real penitent ſhould ariſe from the diſhonour he hath done to God. The reproach he hath brought on religion ſhould wound him more deeply than the ſhame or fear he hath brought upon himſelf. Let the ſhamefulneſs of every bad action bear a part in ſhewing you its

abominable nature. But I am bold to affirm, that they are ſtrangers to true penitence, in whom a ſenſe of ſhame is ſtronger than a ſenſe of ſin.

This attachment to ſecret ſin admits of various degrees. It is ſometimes ſtronger, and ſometimes weaker; ſometimes general, and ſometimes more confined. There are inſtances in which it appears chiefly by the continuance and influence of ſome one darling luſt, which the ſinner cannot give up. This holds its place after others are ſurrendered; and though it dare not appear openly in the converſation, retains its dominion in the heart, and is indulged under the covert of ſecrecy. The arguments adduced in its defence, the excuſes offered for it by the ſinner to his own mind, are very many; but that it is a regarding iniquity in the heart, appears from its being concealed. It would ſeek no hiding place, if it were not one of the works of darkneſs.

2. They regard iniquity in the heart, who entertain and indulge the deſire of ſin, although in the courſe of providence they may be reſtrained from the actual commiſſion of it. I am perſuaded the inſtances are not rare, of men feeding upon ſinful deſires, even when, through want of opportunity, through the fear of man, or through ſome partial reſtraint of conſcience, they dare not carry them into execution. This will be beſt illuſtrated by particular examples; and therefore I ſhall juſt mention the three following—impurity, ſenſuality, and malice.

Men may indulge themſelves in unchaſte and laſcivious thoughts; they may allow their imagina-

tions to run out upon such subjects, meditate and dwell upon them with delight, drink in with pleasure such discourses or such writings as present them with polluted images, although they are restrained from the commission of gross acts of uncleanness. All who voluntarily indulge themselves in such mental impurity, who think it enough to abstain from the criminal action, or perhaps maintain some prudent reserve and decency of conversation, but do not make conscience of watching over their inward desires, beyond all question they regard iniquity in the heart. For this we have the express testimony of our blessed Saviour, Matth. v. 27. 28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Again,

Men may habitually indulge themselves in sensuality of heart, when they have little or no opportunity of giving the rein to sensuality in practice. They may please themselves with the imagination or expectation of worldly greatness, or worldly delights. Such things may be the theme of their meditation, and the objects of their sinful affections, although they shall never come into their possession. Their sensuality of heart may discover itself by impatient complaints of their own state, which has not given them the means of indulgence, or by envious repining at the outward prosperity of others, who are more liberally provided for. Nay, I would say the same thing of those who have the means of gratification, and yet are usually sober,

if their reſtraint is owing to no better principle than the fear of ſickneſs, or the fear of men.

Once more: Men may indulge themſelves in malice againſt others, although it be chiefly confined to the ſecret working of their hearts. Prudence or cowardice may hinder men from doing miſchief, even when they are full of inward malice. Envy, that corroding, waſting worm, chiefly preys upon the heart. Men may rejoice at the calamities of others, or indulge reſentment of ſuppoſed injuries, which is never carried into effect. All ſuch, my brethren, regard iniquity in their heart, and are living in the wilful and deliberate breach of the law of God, which is pure and ſpiritual, and hath the heart as its principal object: Matth. v. 21. 22. "Ye have heard that it hath been ſaid by them of old time, Thou ſhalt not kill; and, whoſoever ſhall kill, ſhall be in danger of the judgement. But I ſay unto you, That whoſoever is angry with his brother without a cauſe, ſhall be in danger of the judgement: and whoſoever ſhall ſay to his brother, Raca, ſhall be in danger of the council: but whoſoever ſhall ſay, Thou fool, ſhall be in danger of hell-fire."

3. They regard iniquity in their heart who reflect upon paſt ſins with delight, or without ſincere humiliation of mind. Perhaps our real diſpoſition, both towards ſin and duty, may be as certainly diſcovered by the ſtate of our minds after, as in the time of action. The ſtrength and ſuddenneſs of temptation may betray even a good man into the commiſſion of ſin; the backwardneſs of heart, and power of inward corruption, may make duty burdenſome,

and occaſion many defects in the performance: but every real Chriſtian remembers his paſt ſins with unfeigned contrition of ſpirit, and a deep ſenſe of unworthineſs before God; and the diſcharge of his duty, however difficult it may have been at the time, affords him the utmoſt pleaſure on reflection. It is otherwiſe with many: they can remember their ſins without ſorrow, they can ſpeak of them without ſhame, and ſometimes even with a mixture of boaſting and vain glory. Did you never hear them recall their paſt follies, and ſpeak of them with ſuch reliſh, that it ſeems to be more to renew the pleaſure, than to regret the ſin. Even ſuppoſing ſuch perſons to have forſaken the practice of ſome ſins, if they can thus look back upon them with inward complacency, their ſeeming reformation muſt be owing to a very different cauſe from renovation of heart. How oppoſite the ſentiments of Job, who conſiders his afflictions as a viſitation of God for his ſins in early life, Job, xiii. 26. "For thou writeſt bitter things againſt me, and makeſt me to poſſeſs the iniquities of my youth." See alſo the prayer of the pſalmiſt, Pſalm xxv. 7. "Remember not the ſins of my youth, nor my tranſgreſſions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodneſs ſake, O Lord."

4. They regard iniquity in the heart, who look upon the ſins of others with approbation, or indeed who can behold them without grief. Sin is ſo abominable a thing, ſo diſhonouring to God, and ſo deſtructive to the ſouls of men, that no real Chriſtian can witneſs it without concern. Hence it is ſo frequently taken notice of in ſcripture, as the character

of a ſervant of God, that he mourns for the ſins of others, Pſal. cxix. 136. 158. "Rivers of water run down mine eyes: becauſe they keep not thy law. I beheld the tranſgreſſors, and was grieved: becauſe they kept not thy word." See alſo the language of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xiii. 17. "But if ye will not hear it, my ſoul ſhall weep in ſecret places for your pride; and mine eye ſhall weep ſore, and run down with tears, becauſe the Lord's flock is carried away captive." 2 Peter, ii. 7. 8. "And delivered juſt Lot, vexed with the filthy converſation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in ſeeing and hearing, vexed his righteous ſoul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)." Have we then among us any, my brethren, who can look upon the ſins of others with complacency or approbation, who excuſe or palliate, who juſtify or defend them? how different is their temper from that of the ſcripture-ſaints juſt now referred to! Whatever outward regularity they may poſſeſs or pretend to, it is plain they are of the number of thoſe who regard iniquity in the heart. To ſome ſins their own nature may not prompt them; from others, the fear of man may reſtrain them; but the Holy Spirit ſurely never has reformed them. It is an infallible maxim, That no man can think lightly of ſin in others, who has an unfeigned hatred of it in himſelf.

This will hold with equal or with greater ſtrength as to thoſe who make the ſins of others the ſubject of their mirth and entertainment. The wiſe man tells us, Prov. xiv. 9. "Fools make a mock of ſin." And the obſervation will hold equally true, whether we conſider the ſin committed, or the danger of

the ſinner. Is there any thing we ſhould hate more than what is ſo offenſive to God, of which he hath expreſſed his deteſtation? And muſt he not regard iniquity in the heart, who can find pleaſure in what ſhould be viewed by every Chriſtian with horror? And what name does he deſerve, who can make himſelf merry with the everlaſting perdition of his fellow-creatures? We have the greateſt reaſon to lament the prevalence of ſin amongſt us, and the boldneſs of ſinners; and little leſs, to lament the reception which both ſin and ſinners meet with among thoſe of whom better things might have been expected.

5. In the *laſt* place, I ſuſpect that they regard ſin in the heart, who are backward to bring themſelves to the trial, and who are not truly willing that God himſelf would ſearch and try them. Sin often lurks ſecretly, and in diſguiſe. He is a ſtranger to religion, who does not know this from experience. Hear the language of the pſalmiſt, Pſal. xix. 12. "Who can underſtand his errors? cleanſe thou me from ſecret faults." Pſal. cxxxix. 23. 24. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and ſee if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlaſting."

If any, therefore, are unwilling to be tried, if they are backward to ſelf-examination, it is an evidence of a ſtrong and powerful attachment to ſin. It can proceed from nothing but from a ſecret dread of ſome diſagreeable diſcovery, of the detection of ſome luſt, which they cannot conſent to forſake. The force of conſcience is ſuch, that ſome deception is neceſſary to keep the ſinner in peace with

himſelf. Too much light would either debar him from his delights, or poiſon the enjoyment of them. This is ſtrongly deſcribed by our Saviour, John, iii. 20. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved."

WE proceed now to the *ſecond* thing propoſed, which was to ſhow, what is to be underſtood by God's not hearing thoſe who regard iniquity in their hearts. This expreſſion of God's not hearing them, may be conſidered very generally, as ſignifying that they are not, nor while they continue in that temper can be, the objects of his favour; he will not remember them with the love which he beareth to his choſen. But as the expreſſion is uſed in ſome particular and diſtinct ſignifications in ſcripture, which will merit our attention, I ſhall briefly mention the chief of them, which ſeem to be the four following.

1. He will not hear them, when they cry to him for deliverance from affliction. I take this to be at leaſt one thing, if not the main thing, intended by the pſalmiſt in the paſſage where the text lies. After giving praiſe to God for a ſignal deliverance, he draws this comfortable concluſion from it: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me: he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." It is one of the characters, as well as one of the privileges, of the children of God, that they fly to him as their refuge in diſtreſs; and he hath given his gracious promiſe, that he will hear them in mercy: Pſal.

xci. 15. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honour him." Psal. l. 15. "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." But those who regard iniquity in their hearts, have no reason to expect that God will hear them in this sense. They are liable to the calamities of human life; they are liable to the strokes of God's righteous providence: but they have no title to go to him for relief. Every affliction carries in it the severity of a judge, without any mixture of the mercy of a father. It is true, that wicked men do sometimes cry to God in distress, but not in the spirit of his children; and, as we learn from this passage, their prayers do not find acceptance with him.

There are three different objects of desire to a good man, while in affliction: the divine presence to support him under it; the sanctified use of it for the improvement of the spiritual life; and, in due time, complete deliverance from it. The two first, he that regards iniquity in his heart will hardly ask; and the last he shall not be able to obtain. The prayer of one unacquainted with God, is little better than the howling of despair and terror, without any mixture of filial confidence. Hosea, vii. 14. "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." As to the sanctified use of their sufferings, they neither ask nor receive it; on the contrary, they are commonly made worse by their sufferings, as earthen vessels are but hardened in the fire. And as to deliverance from suffering, they shall never

obtain more than perhaps a temporary ſuſpenſion of outward ſtrokes, till they fill up the meaſure of their iniquities, and be ripe for final deſtruction.

I cannot help juſt hinting in this place, that when God viſits his children's faults with rods, and their ſins with chaſtiſements, till they forſake their ſins by true repentance, he will not hear them. If they have departed from the paths of truth and righteouſneſs, if they have taken of the accurſed thing which was between him and them, there cannot be peace: Iſaiah, lix. 1. "Behold the Lord's hand is not ſhortened, that it cannot ſave; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." The very intention of affliction to the children of God, is to ſeparate them from ſin, and it muſt continue till it produces its effect. What he ſays of the inhabitants of Jeruſalem in general, is but an emblem of the manner in which he will treat every particular perſon of the true Iſrael: Iſaiah i. 25. "And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy droſs, and take away all thy tin."

2. He will not hear them, when they intercede for others. It is in this ſenſe that the word is uſed in the goſpel according to John, ch. ix. 31. "Now, we know that God heareth not ſinners: but if any man be a worſhipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." We are expreſsly taught by the apoſtle James, that it is the prayer of faith, and the prayer of the righteous, that hath power with God: James v. 15. 16. "And the prayer of faith ſhall ſave the ſick, and the Lord ſhall raiſe him up; and if he have committed ſins, they ſhall be forgiven him. Confeſs your faults one to another,

and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." I am ſenſible, my brethren, that this will ſeem of very little moment to many, or probably to the greateſt part, of thoſe who regard iniquity in their hearts. Not much accuſtomed to the exerciſe of prayer for themſelves, it will make but a light impreſſion on them, to be told that they will not be heard in their interceſſion for others. The truth is, many, if they would attend to it, carry their own condemnation in themſelves, from this very circumſtance. Conſcious that they have little intereſt at the throne of grace, they ſeldom think of employing it at all. But conſidering that there is ſcarcely any perſon wholly unrelated to others, and that many have occaſion, from time to time, to ſee thoſe to whom they are united by the moſt tender ties, lying under the preſſure of affliction, it ought to cover them with confuſion, that they know not what it is to look to God, as the hearer of prayer, and to lend that help which they may ſhortly require. When we ſee one member of a family lying under the rod, and a profane huſband or wife, parent or child, ſtanding by in hopeleſs diſtreſs and prayerleſs tears, it is hard to ſay which of the two is the greater object of diſtreſs.

And what an incitement ſhould it be to thoſe who are often called to the duty of interceſſion, either from their office or their character, to walk circumſpectly, that they may not mar their confidence in God. Let them guard with double diligence againſt any thing that is provoking to God.

Let them ſtrive to keep clear their intereſt in his favour, leſt they ſhould at once wound their peace and deſtroy their uſefulneſs; for if they regard iniquity in their heart, the Lord will not hear them.

3. He will not hear them, when they draw near to him in worſhip. This alſo is often the meaning of the expreſſion in ſcripture, Iſaiah, i. 14. 15. "Your new moons, and your appointed feaſts, my ſoul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." There are many other paſſages to the ſame purpoſe, particularly that of Solomon, Prov. xv. 8. "The ſacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The pſalmiſt was ſo ſenſible of this, that he ſays, Pſal. v. 4. 5. 6. 7. "For thou art not a God that hath pleaſure in wickedneſs; neither ſhall evil dwell with thee. The fooliſh ſhall not ſtand in thy ſight: Thou hateſt all workers of iniquity. Thou ſhalt deſtroy them that ſpeak leaſing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man. But as for me, I will come into thy houſe in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worſhip toward thy holy temple."

This ought to make a deep and ſerious impreſſion on your minds. There are but too many who, though they live in the practice of ſin, and regard iniquity in their hearts, do yet continue their outward attendance on the ordinances of divine inſtitution, and at ſtated times lay hold of the ſeals of

God's covenant. Shall they find any acceptance with him? No. He counts it a profane mockery; he counts it a ſacrilegious uſurpation, Pſalm l. 16. 17. "But unto the wicked God ſaith, What haſt thou to do to declare my ſtatutes, or that thou ſhouldſt take my covenant in thy mouth? ſeeing thou hateſt inſtruction, and caſteſt my words behind thee." Shall they have any comfort in it? No, unleſs in ſo far as in righteous judgement he ſuffers them to be deceived; and they are deceived, and moſt unhappy they who lie longeſt under the deluſion: Pſalm l. 21. "Theſe things haſt thou done, and I kept ſilence: thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch an one as thyſelf; but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thine eyes." Shall they have any benefit by it? No, inſtead of appeaſing his wrath, it provokes his vengeance. Inſtead of enlightening their minds, it blinds their eyes. Inſtead of ſanctifying their nature, it hardens their hearts. See a deſcription of thoſe who had been long favoured with outward privileges, and gloried in them, John, xii. 39. 40. "Therefore they could not believe, becauſe that Eſaias ſaid again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they ſhould not ſee with their eyes, nor underſtand with their heart, and be converted, and I ſhould heal them." So that nothing is more eſſential to an acceptable approach to God, in the duties of his worſhip in general, and particularly to receiving the ſeals of his covenant, than a thorough and univerſal ſeparation from all known ſin: Job, xi. 13. 14. "If thou prepare thine heart, and ſtretch out thine hands towards him; if ini-

quity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedneſs dwell in thy tabernacles."

4. He will not hear them, when they cry for mercy at laſt. Sooner or later the ſinner's eyes will be opened. Sooner or later he ſhall be convinced of the folly of his miſerable choice. Many of thoſe who regard iniquity in their hearts, ſleep in ſecurity, and flatter themſelves with miſtaken hopes; but, Gal. vi. 7. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap." From the account given by our Saviour, it would appear that the final ſentence ſhall, in many inſtances, be matter of ſurpriſe as well as terror to the ſinner: Matth. vii. 22. 23. "Many will ſay to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name? and in thy name have caſt out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profeſs unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Nay, perhaps we may ſay, that to ſome the day of God's mercy may be over before the cloſe of life; and they may find no place for repentance, though they may ſeek it carefully, and with tears. Not but that wherever there is true penitence, even at the eleventh hour, forgiveneſs will be the effect; but we may juſtly ſuppoſe that there may be a deſpairing cry for mercy, from the apprehenſions of impending judgement, without any thorough conviction of ſin. The reception that ſuch will meet with, and the reaſon upon which it is founded, is repreſented in the ſtrongeſt language, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28. "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed; I have

ſtretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have ſet at nought all my counſel, and would none of my reproof: I alſo will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as deſolation, and your deſtruction cometh as a whirlwind; when diſtreſs and anguiſh cometh upon you: then ſhall they call upon me, but I will not anſwer; they ſhall ſeek me early, but they ſhall not find me."

I PROCEED now to make ſome practical improvement of this ſubject, for your inſtruction and direction. And,

1. Suffer me to ſpeak a little to thoſe who live in the open habitual practice of groſs ſin. It grieves me to think, my brethren, that any ſuch ſhould be found or ſuppoſed in this worſhipping aſſembly. It diſtreſſes me ſtill more, to think that any ſuch ſhould have the preſumption to aſk, or the art to obtain permiſſion, and the dreadful hardineſs to ſit down at the Lord's table. I ſhall deſcribe you, not by your names, which are known to men, but your characters and hearts, which are open before God. Swearers and profaners of Jehovah's name, deſpiſers of his Sabbaths, ſcorners of ſacred things, neglecters of prayer, ſons of violence, midnight rioters, beaſtly drunkards, unclean fornicators, takers and holders of unjuſt gain, liars and ſlanderers, hard-hearted oppreſſors, and whoſoever liveth under the dominion of known ſin. Is the nature of God ſo holy, is his law ſo ſpiritual, is his judgement ſo ſevere, that thoſe who but regard iniquity in their hearts ſhall inevitably periſh? then how ſhall you

eſcape the damnation of hell? Is memory ſo unfaithful, as not now to bring your ſins to remembrance? Is conſcience ſo feared as not to charge you with the guilt? Can you doubt of the being, do you not feel the preſence, do you not fear the judgement of God? "The wicked ſhall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God; for Tophet is ordained of old," &c.

O that it would pleaſe God, by his omnipotent grace, to reach your hearts, to ſhake your confidence, to humble you to the duſt! I call God to record, that you have received warning. I know that you may deſpiſe it; I am afraid that many will do ſo. Away to your cups, away to the bleſſed ſtage, that dear friend to virtue; away to your merry, ſocial life, drink confuſion to your preachers, and pour forth every term of reproach that your little wit can ſuggeſt, againſt theſe poor prieſt-ridden creatures, who are afraid of their miniſter's reproof. Alas, alas! when the king of terrors, on his pale horſe, ſhall make his approach, you will be of another mind, unleſs perhaps, as it often happens, you meet with a ſudden call, an immediate tranſlation from the fire of luſt to the fire of hell.

2. Let me intreat you, my dear brethren, from what has been ſaid, to ſearch and try yourſelves, whether you regard iniquity in your hearts, or not. This is the rather neceſſary, as you have in view an immediate and ſolemn appeal to God, that you are ſincere in his covenant. Does the fear of the Lord poſſeſs you in ſecret, as well as in public? Are you willing that it ſhould be ſo? Is it your

daily ſtudy, and is it the ſubject of your daily prayer, to have a deeper and more lively impreſſion of his preſence upon your ſpirits? Is it truly matter of comfort to you, when you are delivered from the fear of human cenſure, or deſire of human approbation? Have you ever got above both in your experience, and do you not wiſh to maintain the ſuperiority? If it is ſo, happy, happy are ye indeed! and may the Lord himſelf lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Do you know what it is to mourn over ſecret ſins, the vanity of your minds, the worldlineſs of your affections? And do you truly make conſcience of keeping the heart with all diligence, becauſe out of it are the iſſues of life? I will not aſk, becauſe I know you cannot deny, that you have had many ſinful thoughts, in breach of every command of God. But are they approved or abhorred? are they ſubmitted to, or reſiſted? are they now recollected with pleaſure, with indifference, or with ſhame?

What are your thoughts with regard to the ſins of others? Have you ever grieved for them in truth? Do not think that I am leading you to oſtentation. I do not aſk you whether you have openly teſtified againſt them, or honeſtly reproved them; becauſe, though theſe are both important and binding duties, they may be more eaſily counterfeited; and I am not now preſſing you to the diſcharge of your duty to others, but trying your ſincerity before God. Have you, therefore, mourned in ſecret for the ſins of others? have they ever brought you to your knees? have they added fervour to your prayers?

If it be ſo, I cannot think that you regard iniquity in your own hearts. This is no phariſaical hypocriſy. It is known only to God. The profane cannot curſe you for it, becauſe they do not hear it: and if they were told it, it is probable they would not believe it.

But methinks I hear ſome ſerious perſon ſay, 'I have attended to the interrogatories; and though I would fain hope I know ſomething of a ſenſe of duty in all, yet, O! how miſerably defective have I been? Nothing like that deep ſenſe of the preſence of God, that humiliation of ſpirit for ſin, that concern for the divine glory, that I ought to have had, that I have ſometimes felt for a ſeaſon, and that I wiſhed to preſerve.'

Therefore, my brethren, I would once more aſk you, Can you now ſincerely pray that God would ſearch and try your ways, diſcover every ſecret ſin, convince you of it, humble you for it, and deliver you from it? Is there no reſerve, no exception whatever, nothing that you are willing to cover, that you are backward to examine, and diſpoſed to excuſe? Is there no doubtful practice, but what you are willing to think of deliberately, to examine impartially, and if it either appears to be ſinful, or but remaineth doubtful, to ſurrender freely? If you can ſay there is not, then, after having pleaded your divorce from every ſin, I have only further to rob you of every duty too, and leave you nothing whereof to glory; to call you to renounce all ſelf-righteouſneſs and ſelf-dependence, and make you to ſay, "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me: ſurely, in the Lord have I righteouſneſs and ſtrength."

3. I ſhall now ſhut up this diſcourſe with giving you a very few directions for your future preſervation.

(1.) Guard againſt the ſin or ſins that you may be moſt liable to, from your natural temper and conſtitution, which may be ſaid to be your own iniquity, and the ſin that moſt eaſily beſets you. It is lamentable to think what diſgraceful blemiſhes are ſometimes to be ſeen in the conduct of the ſervants of God. I know this is permitted in providence, and cannot be wholly prevented. But no watchful Chriſtian will ſit ſtill eaſily under it. If ſuch a ſin gives him no reſt, he ſhould give it no quarter. Some very bad things are ſometimes borne with, under the notion of unavoidable infirmities. Yet they are to the prejudice of your own peace; they are a reproach to your profeſſion, and a diſhonour to your Maſter. If you cannot wholly deſtroy, I beſeech you wound and weaken them. If there is no probability that they will die wholly, but with the body, let it be ſeen that they are daily loſing ſtrength, and dying gradually.

(2.) Set a particular guard upon thoſe ſins that you may be oppoſed to, in your ordinary calling: in that way, where you go moſt frequently, the tempter knows he can moſt eaſily find you, and he will certainly be there to meet you. Beſides, intereſt often pleads ſo ſtrongly in behalf of ſome ſins of this kind, and they are ſo much juſtified by example, that few can withſtand the temptation. But conſider, I beſeech you, that no honour, profit, or convenience, can poſſibly counterbalance the loſs of God's favour! What a miſerable excellency is it,

indeed, to add a little to our earthly ſtore at the expence of his diſpleaſure, while we ourſelves are in his hand, and all that we have is in the moſt abſolute manner at his diſpoſal!

In the *laſt* place, If you deſire to be preſerved from the dominion of ſin, ſeat yourſelves often in the preſence of God. He ſeeth in ſecret, his eyes do ſee, his eye-lids try the children of men. Aſk of him, therefore, that he may not ſuffer you to deceive yourſelves, but lead you in the paths of righteouſneſs for his name's ſake.

SERMON XV.

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST.

Preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Chriſtian Knowledge, in the High Church of Edinburgh, on Monday, January 2. 1758.

ACTS, iv. 12.

Neither is there ſalvation in any other: for there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we muſt be ſaved.

IT is not eaſy to conceive any ſubject at once more important in itſelf, more ſeaſonable in this age, and more ſuited to the deſign of the preſent meeting, than the abſolute neceſſity of ſalvation through Chriſt. We live in an age in which (as is often complained) infidelity greatly prevails; but yet in which the cauſe of truth hath much leſs to fear from the aſſaults of its open enemies, than from the treachery of its pretended advocates. The lateſt infidel writers have carried their own ſcheme to ſuch perfection or extravagance, that it muſt diſ-

credit the cauſe in the eye of every ſober judge.* And indeed the goſpel can ſcarcely receive a greater injury, than when any profeſſing attachment to it, condeſcend to enter the liſts with ſuch abſurdities, or give ground of ſuſpicion that they ſtand in need of a ſerious refutation.

But there is another quarter from which we have much greater reaſon to apprehend danger, viz. that claſs of men, who, being nominal Chriſtians, diſguiſe or alter the goſpel, in order to defend it. Theſe often endeavour to give ſuch views of Chriſtianity, as will render it palatable to a corrupt worldly mind; and, inſtead of abaſing, will ſooth and gratify the pride of man. Hence the unnatural mixture often to be ſeen of modern philoſophy with ancient Chriſtianity. Hence the fundamental doctrines of the goſpel are ſoftened, concealed, or denied; as, the loſt and guilty ſtate of man by nature, his liableneſs to everlaſting miſery, and the neceſſity of that ſatisfaction and ranſom which was paid by our Re-

* See David Hume's writings on morals throughout; where, beſides leaving out entirely our duty to God, which he hath, in common with many other late writers, he expreſsly founds juſtice upon power and conveniency, derides chaſtity, and turns many of the moſt important virtues into vices. See alſo Eſſays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion; the author of which, at one deciſive blow, takes away all ſin, by founding virtue on a deluſive feeling. Theſe writings are far from being hurtful in proportion to the intention of their authors: for though the principles contained in them are often retailed in converſation, yet it is only by way of amuſement, on account of their boldneſs or novelty, not one in an hundred appearing to have any ſerious conviction of their truth.

deemer when he died on the croſs. Inſtead of theſe, are we not many times preſented with a character of Chriſt as a teacher only, and not a Saviour; as one excellently qualified to reform the abuſes that had ſomehow or other crept into the world, but the real ſource of which is hardly confeſſed, and never willingly brought into view? Is not our bleſſed Redeemer thereby put on a level, and expreſsly claſſed with mortal reformers? Perhaps, indeed, a ſmall compliment of ſuperiority is paid him; which, however, there is reaſon to ſuſpect ariſes more from a prudent compliance with eſtabliſhed faith, than from any inward and cordial eſteem.

What could be reaſonably expected as the effect of ſuch conduct? No other than we find by experience hath actually taken place, that a cauſe ſo ill defended muſt daily loſe ground. The nearer Chriſtianity is brought to the principles of infidels to ſolicit their eſteem, the leſs occaſion will they ſee for it at all; and when it is perverted from its original purpoſe, it can expect no countenance from its real author. The truth is, if there be no more in the goſpel than many by their language and writings would lead us to conceive, it is of ſmall conſequence whether it be embraced or not; and there can be little merit in a ſociety who have this as the deſign of their union, to ſpread and propagate Chriſtian knowledge. But very different are the ſentiments expreſſed by the apoſtle Peter in the the text; where, ſpeaking of Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth, he ſays, "Neither is there ſalvation in any

other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

I am sensible, there are some of the very persons hinted at above, who endeavour to explain away this text, and give it a very different meaning from that in which you will easily perceive I understand it. They make salvation to refer to the cure recorded in the preceding chapter, wrought upon the lame man! as if the apostle had said, "Neither is there a power of healing in any other," &c. This is but one instance among many of the force and constraint they put upon scripture, in order to accommodate it to their own sentiments. I shall not waste your time by a tedious refutation of this criticism, as the sense I affix to the words will be sufficiently supported by what shall follow on the subject. They appear to me plainly to affirm, that there is no other way by which sinners of mankind can escape everlasting misery, but through Christ.

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, through divine assistance,

I. After a little illustrating the meaning of the assertion, to establish and confirm its truth from the word of God.

II. To make a few reflections on this scheme, and shew, that it is not only most self-consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts of scripture, as well as to the visible state of the world; and therefore that those who, in reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any measure, do thereby betray the cause which they profess to support.

III. I shall make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I RETURN to the *first* of these.

And as to the meaning of the assertion, the word *saving*, or *salvation*, evidently supposes a state of misery from which our deliverance must be wrought; and therefore no more than the full meaning of the passage is expressed in what follows, That all the posterity of Adam are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; alienated in heart from the love of God, and exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure. That they have not only access to salvation through Christ, but that in this work he hath no rival; it is his, exclusive of all others: so that no man, whatever be his character, or whatever be his hope, shall enter into rest, unless he be reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ.

Now, that all mankind are by nature in a state of guilt and condemnation, is evident from the whole strain of the holy scriptures. This originally constituted the necessity of a Saviour, and alone illustrates the love and mercy of God in the appearance of his Son in our nature. Unless this is supposed, the whole dispensations of the grace of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New, lose their beauty, and lose their meaning; nay, and would be justly esteemed foolishness, as they are in fact by all who see not this foundation upon which they are built. As our first parents, and the earth for their sakes, were laid under a curse immediately after the original transgression; so the effects of this apostacy on their posterity are amply declared in scripture. We have this repeated testimony from God himself concerning the old world: Gen. vi. 5. "And God saw that the wickedness

of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And again, Gen. viii. 21. "And the Lord ſaid in his heart, I will not again curſe the ground any more for man's ſake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

The rites and ceremonies of the Moſaic diſpenſation alſo, together with the whole hiſtory of providence contained in the Old Teſtament, ſuppoſe the guilt and impurity of our nature. But the goſpel, as it is in all reſpects a clearer diſpenſation than the former, ſo it is moſt full and expreſs upon this ſubject. Inſtead of enumerating many paſſages, we may conſult the epiſtle of the apoſtle Paul to the Romans, where there is a diſtinct and laboured illuſtration of the guilt and apoſtacy of all mankind; towards the concluſion of which he thus expreſſes himſelf, Rom. iii. 9.—12. "For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under ſin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that underſtandeth, there is none that ſeeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one." And a little after, Rom. iii. 19. "That every mouth may be ſtopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." To this I ſhall only add one paſſage from the ſame apoſtle: Eph. ii. 3. "Among whom alſo we all had our converſation in times paſt, in the luſts of our fleſh, fulfilling the deſires of the fleſh, and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

That the ſame ſcriptures point out to us one only remedy for this our miſery, is equally evident. Chriſt Jeſus was promiſed to our firſt parents under the deſignation of the ſeed of the woman, who ſhould bruiſe the head of the ſerpent. He is afterwards promiſed to Abraham as his ſeed, in whom all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed; to Jacob as Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people ſhould be. He is pointed out by Moſes as the great Prophet that ſhould come into the world. And unleſs we ſuppoſe a typical reference to Chriſt in the legal waſhings, ſacrifices, and other ſervices, they will appear altogether unworthy of God, and altogether inſufficient for the purpoſes for which they were uſed. This indeed is affirmed by the apoſtle to the Hebrews, Heb. x. 4. "For it is not poſſible that the blood of bulls and of goats ſhould take away ſins." In the later prophets, there are many diſtinct and particular, many high and magnificent deſcriptions of the glory of Chriſt's perſon, and the greatneſs of his work. The attention and expectation of every believer is directed to him; and he is ſtyled, Hag. ii. 6. "The deſire of all nations."

And in the New Teſtament, at his conception it it ſaid, Matth. i. 21. "Thou ſhalt call his name Jeſus, for he ſhall ſave his people from their ſins." At his entrance on his public miniſtry, he is thus deſignated by John the Baptiſt, John, i. 29. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the ſin of the world." The great deſign of his appearing in our nature, is declared in many paſſages of ſcripture. And as ſalvation is promiſed to thoſe who

believe, so the condemnation of all unbelievers is necessarily implied as its counterpart, and often expressly affirmed. Thus the apostle John represents our Saviour himself as teaching, John, iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not PERISH, but have everlasting life." And when he gave commission to his disciples to preach the gospel, it was in these terms: Mark, xvi. 15. 16. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." The very meaning of the word *gospel* is glad tidings; importing not only the great, but the distinguishing happiness of those who hear the message, and comply with the call. The apostles, who spread these glad tidings through the world, considered themselves as bringing salvation to those who before sat in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death. And by the following description given by the apostle Paul of the state of the Ephesians before conversion, may be seen what view he had of the condition of all who knew not God, as well as who believed not the gospel, Eph. ii. 12. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." From the above summary, I hope it clearly appears, that, according to the scriptures, there is no salvation in any other than in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

It will, however, be proper, for the further illuſtration of this ſubject, to conſider a little to what this doctrine ſtands oppoſed. And though it is impoſſible diſtinctly to enumerate every thing that may in ſome ſhape or other be put in Chriſt's room, or attempt to rob him of his glory as a Saviour; yet, in general, they may all be reduced to the two following heads: 1*ſt*, Falſe religions, and uninſtituted rites; 2*dly*, Self-righteouſneſs, or the merit of our own defective obedience to the moral law. It is neceſſary to conſider each of theſe by itſelf, and to ſtate the bounds between them: for however little relation they may ſeem to have one to another, they are often mingled together in our apprehenſions, and mutually ſupport and ſtrengthen each other's cauſe.

In the *firſt* place, then, All worſhip of falſe gods, holding for truth what hath not the ſtamp of divine authority, and all uncommanded worſhip, be the object of it what it will, is wholly ineffectual to ſalvation: nay, ſo far is any thing of this kind from being ſufficient to ſupplant, or proper to co-operate with what Chriſt hath done, that it is deteſtable in the ſight of God. Perhaps it may be thought, that this is of ſmall moment, and wholly unworthy of notice; as in theſe days few or none will ſo much as pretend, except in jeſt, to lay any ſtreſs upon fabulous deities, or ſuperſtitious practices of human invention. But I did not chooſe to omit it, becauſe it appears to me a thing peculiarly inſiſted on in the holy ſcriptures, which contain nothing unneceſſary. It is alſo very much the ob-

ject of the resentment of infidels.* At the same time, many pretended Christians have, by design or inadvertence, spoken too much the language of infidels on this subject, or on subjects nearly related to it.

How much stress the scriptures lay upon the knowledge of the true God, nay, how pernicious and destructive all false religions are, it were easy to shew at great length; but a few hints will suffice, as it is not a point controverted, so much as neglected and forgotten. The very first commandment of the moral law is, Exod. xx. 3. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the second, which forbids uninstituted worship, hath this strong sanction, Exod. xx. 5. "For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Through the whole Old Testament, the idolatry and false worship of the heathens is represented as highly criminal in them, and an abomination in the sight of God. It is there considered not as a small part, but as the first and most provoking of their enormities; and, in particular, is assigned as the ground of the utter extirpation of the nations of Canaan. In a perfect consistency with which, in the charge brought against them by the apostle

* It is very remarkable, that though infidels always set out on pretence of searching impartially after truth; yet they have unanimously agreed in putting truth and error entirely upon the same footing, both as to worth and influence.

Paul, this is the leading part or ground-work of the whole, Rom. i. 21. "Becauſe that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened." Ver. 23. "And changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things."

The great end alſo of the ſeparation of the children of Iſrael, and their being kept from intercourſe with other nations, was, that they might be preſerved from idolatry. To the worſhip of the true God their bleſſings are promiſed, and againſt defection from his ſervice to other gods the heavieſt curſes are denounced. Thus, after an enumeration of the bleſſings that ſhould attend them if they kept God's commandments, it is ſaid, Deut. xxviii. 14. "And thou ſhalt not go aſide from any of the words that I command thee this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to ſerve them." And when they ſtood before the Lord, to enter into his covenant, it is ſaid, Deut. xxix. 16. 17. 18. "For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the nations which ye paſſed by. And ye have ſeen their abominations, and their idols, wood and ſtone, ſilver and gold, which were among them. Leſt there ſhould be among you, man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whoſe heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and ſerve the gods of the nations; leſt there ſhould be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood." The

same thing may be seen running through the whole of the prophetic writings. Almost every judgement of God, threatened or inflicted, is ascribed to their idolatry as its cause. I only mention one passage, not for any thing particular in it, but as a sufficient specimen of the whole. It is a message from God by Ezekiel to the children of Israel: Ezek. xiv. 6. 7. 8. "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself, and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

In the very same manner, in the New Testament, embracing the gospel of Christ, and continuing stedfast in the faith, is required as absolutely necessary to salvation: John, iii. 36. "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The importance of holding the truth without mixture, is plainly declared in the following passage: James, v. 19. 20. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his ways, shall

ſave a ſoul from death, and ſhall hide a multitude of ſins."

It had been eaſy to have given a much larger proof of this from ſcripture; but it is unneceſſary, for our enemies themſelves confeſs it, nay, object it as a ground of reproach. How many invectives have we from infidel writers againſt the unpeaceable, unſocial ſpirit of the Jewiſh firſt, and afterwards of the Chriſtian religion! And how often are theſe contraſted with the mild and aſſociating temper of the Heathen worſhippers! Among them it implied no abſurdity, that different nations ſhould have different gods, and different forms of worſhip; nay, they often intermixed, compounded, and mutually adopted each other's worſhip. The Athenians, that wiſe people, were ſo prone to receive every foreign rite, that they got this character from an ancient writer, (whether by way of encomium, indeed, or ſatire, is at this diſtance uncertain), that they were hoſpitable to the gods. According to the ſentiments of modern unbelievers, they would deſerve much praiſe for this; but according to the ſentiments of an inſpired apoſtle, "profeſſing themſelves wiſe, they became fools."

In this, then, it is acknowledged, that the goſpel of our ſalvation eſſentially differs from every human invention; that it conſtantly repreſents itſelf as THE TRUTH, and all things oppoſite to it as falſe, diſhonourable to God, and unprofitable to men. This has been the caſe in every ſtep of its progreſs, from its riſe in the comparative obſcurity of the original promiſe, through all the preparatory diſcoveries of ſucceeding ages; to its complete manifeſtation in

the fulneſs of time. And though it has been expoſed on this account to the virulent reproaches of men of corrupt minds, it is but ſo much the more credible, and appears to be from the one only, the living, unchangeable, and true God.*

It may be proper here to obſerve, that it is either the ſame objection aſſuming a different form, or one very much like it, when it is alledged againſt the goſpel, That it lays too much ſtreſs upon mere belief of the truth. To this ſome have, perhaps by miſtaking the true ſpring of the objection, given a very wrong and dangerous anſwer. They deny the fact, that the goſpel does lay too much, or any ſtreſs at all upon bare belief, ſeparate from goodneſs of life. The danger of this anſwer does not lie in its being falſe, but in its being ambiguous, incomplete, and in a great meaſure improper. It ſeems to allow, at leaſt not to deny, that there may be ſincere belief, while yet it is not attended with its proper fruits. Thus, unbelievers, whoſe real quarrel is with the alledged importance and efficacy of the truth, are hardened in their indifference and diſregard to it; whereas they ought to be taught to conſider the principles which are productive of real reformation, as more excellent in themſelves, as both neceſſary and effectual for this purpoſe.

The goſpel does indeed lay great ſtreſs upon belief of the truth, not without, but as the only way of producing holineſs. Many paſſages may be cited from the Old Teſtament, in which going

* See this ſubject handled with great clearneſs and preciſion, by Dr Warburton, in his Divine Legation of Moſes.

after falſe gods, and committing other groſs crimes, are repreſented as inſeparable branches of the ſame character; and worſhipping and ſerving the true God, as a ſummary deſcription of univerſal obedience. See Deut. xxix. 18. 19. Numb. xxv. 1. 2. And many paſſages may be produced from the New Teſtament, in which the good effects of the truth, and the miſery of departing from it, as neceſſarily implying an unſanctified ſtate, are declared. See John, viii. 31. 32. xvii. 17. 2 John, ver. 4. Col. i. 5. 6. From all this I conclude, that Chriſt Jeſus, the promiſe of old made unto the fathers, the hope of Iſrael, the light of the world, and the end of the law for righteouſneſs to every one that believeth, is the only Saviour of ſinners, in oppoſition to all falſe religions, and every uninſtituted rite; as he himſelf ſays, John, xiv. 6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

But, 2*dly*, Chriſt is the only Saviour, in oppoſition to the merit of our own obedience to the moral law. I know, ſome will be ready to ſuppoſe, that though falſe religion and uninſtituted rites may have no poſitive influence in procuring ſalvation to thoſe who embrace them, yet they may not hinder their acceptance with God by virtue of their own perſonal merit and obedience. On this ſubject there are many things which deſerve a more particular and diſtinct conſideration than there is room for at preſent; ſuch as, 1. That all falſe religion is not merely unprofitable, but highly criminal in the ſight of God. Thus the apoſtle Paul, 1 Cor. x. 20. "But I ſay, That the things which the Gentiles ſa-

crifice, they ſacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye ſhould have fellowſhip with devils." 2. That all who embrace not the truth as it is in Jeſus, muſt neglect the whole duties of the firſt table of the moral law, and ſo their obedience be not only greatly, but eſſentially defective. 3. That the Scriptures give us no ground to believe, that falſe principles can produce any virtue but what is ſpurious. But inſtead of inſiſting upon theſe at preſent, I ſhall only attempt to ſhew, that the ſcriptures exclude all human merit, and indeed ſeem to have it as their expreſs purpoſe, to ſtain the pride of all human glory; and, therefore, that no pretence of this kind can poſſibly be admitted.

And here I ſhall wholly paſs the ſacrifices of atonement under the Moſaic diſpenſation, becauſe they all pointed at the ſacrifice offered by Chriſt upon the croſs; and therefore, in the account given of the end and deſtination of this laſt, we may expect the cleareſt view of the grounds of our acceptance with God. Now, Chriſt appears in ſcripture as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſin of the world:" as "giving his life" for his people; as "bearing their ſins in his own body on the tree." And indeed every expreſſion is uſed that could well be imagined to ſignify a propitiatory ſacrifice, an atonement for ſin, or the puniſhment of an innocent perſon in the room and ſtead of the guilty. If this was neceſſary for any, it was neceſſary for all; and there is not the leaſt intimation given in ſcripture of any diſtinction, or hint, as if there were any perſons with regard to whom it was ſuperfluous. Nothing, therefore, can ſtand more di-

rectly oppoſed to the deſign of the goſpel, than any plea of merit in man: and none do in fact receive it with more diſdain, than thoſe who truſt in themſelves that they are righteous.

But, for our ſatisfaction on this point, we need only conſult the epiſtle to the Romans, before referred to, as there is no part of the ſacred writings where there is a more full and connected account of the foundation of the goſpel. There, after proving that all the world are become guilty before God, the apoſtle ſays, Rom. iii. 20. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there ſhall no fleſh be juſtified in his ſight: for by the law is the knowledge of ſin." Ver. 24. 25. "Being juſtified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jeſus Chriſt: whom God hath ſet forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteouſneſs for the remiſſion of ſins that are paſt, through the forbearance of God." And again, ch. v. 18. "Therefore, as by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even ſo by the righteouſneſs of one, the free gift came upon all men to juſtification of life." Conſonant to this is the doctrine of the ſame apoſtle elſewhere: Phil. iii. 8. 9. "Yea, doubtleſs, and I count all things but loſs, for the excellency of the knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus my Lord; for whom I have ſuffered the loſs of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Chriſt, and be found in him, not having mine own righteouſneſs, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Chriſt, the righteouſneſs which is of God by faith*."

* See alſo Rom. iv. 23.—25. Tit. iii. 5.

I am not inſenſible, that great pains have been taken, even by ſome Chriſtians, to evade the force of theſe paſſages of ſcripture, which exclude the merit of man's obedience from any ſhare in his juſtification before God. Particularly the paſſages from the epiſtle to the Romans are evaded, by alledging, that the law, and the works of the law, there, mean only the rites of the Moſaic diſpenſation. This is not a proper time and place for entering fully into that controverſy; and therefore I ſhall only obſerve, that, beſides the correſpondence of the above interpretation with all the other parts of ſcripture, it may be ſufficiently ſupported by this one conſideration, That the apoſtle, who is ſpeaking both of Jews and Gentiles, expreſsly ſtates the oppoſition with reſpect to our juſtification between grace and debt, and excludes every thing that might make it of debt: Rom. iii. 27. 28. "Where is boaſting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith, Therefore we conclude, that a man is juſtified by faith, without the deeds of the law." And to the ſame purpoſe, a little after, Rom. iv. 4. 5. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that juſtifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteouſneſs." Whatever would make our acceptance with God not free, or not of grace, is here excluded *. Now, certainly, as there

* It is eaſy to foreſee, that a grand objection againſt what is ſaid on this head will be, That it is going upon a very narrow ſcheme, and a ſcheme very uncharitable to many parties of Chriſtians. It is the faſhionable language

is a much more plauſible plea of merit in favour of works of obedience to the moral, than to the ceremonial law; the firſt are at leaſt as much excluded as the laſt by the apoſtle's reaſoning.

of the age, to give large encomiums upon charity, when the deſign is to level truth and falſehood; and to alledge, either that there is little difference between them as to their effects, or that they cannot be diſtinguiſhed from one another by their proper marks. This is a ſubject that needs as much to be ſet in a proper light, as any I know. If the ſenſe in which charity in ſentiment is commonly underſtood, viz. a favourable judgement of the opinions of others, be the ſcripture-meaning of it, then certainly ſome bounds muſt be ſet to it; and it muſt be praiſe or blame worthy, according to the caſes in which it is exerciſed. I muſt needs take it for granted, that there are ſome fundamental errors, and that it is poſſible to make ſhipwreck of the faith. Now, however common or faſhionable it may be, to think the farther charity is extended the better, it may be demonſtrated, that a favourable judgement of errors fundamental, or deſtructive of religion, doth neceſſarily imply either a light eſteem or weak perſuaſion of the truth, or both. This ſurely is no part of a truly Chriſtian character; and if it be rightly denominated charity, it is become vicious by exceſs. I confeſs it appears to me, that juſtification by free grace is a fundamental doctrine of the goſpel. If this be true, I am not wrong in having the deepeſt ſenſe of the danger of contrary opinions: nay, if I am miſtaken, the conſequences I draw from it are no breaches of charity, but the neceſſary effects of an error in judgement; and ſo I claim charity in my turn from my adverſaries upon their own principles.

But I am perſuaded the above is not the meaning of the word charity in ſcripture, but that it means an ardent and unfeigned love to others, and a deſire of their welfare, temporal and eternal; and may very well conſiſt with the ſtrongeſt abhorrence of their wicked principles. We do

Thus I have endeavoured both to explain and confirm the assertion in the text, That there is no salvation in any other but in Christ. There is, however, one question upon it which I would willingly pass over in silence, but that the omission of it might, to some intelligent hearers, weaken the conclusion, and make them reckon the subject incompletely handled. The question is, Whether an objective revelation and explicit discovery of Christ, and what he hath wrought, is necessary to salvation? or, if his undertaking may not be the ground of acceptance for many who never heard of his name? In support of the last of these it is said, That many of the ancient patriarchs and prophets were far from having distinct views of the person,

find indeed in scripture many charges, not to judge one another, mutually to forbear one another in things indifferent, and not to suppose that men's outward actions proceed from a bad principle, which they do not profess. But this is never called charity; and it is, by the reasoning on it, expressly limited to the things really indifferent in their nature. (See the 14th and 15th chapters of the epistle to the Romans.) Perhaps it will be said, Some may judge things to be necessary, which in truth are but indifferent. This cannot be denied; but there is no help for it. It is a consequence of the imperfection of human nature. Yet still every man must judge for himself, and must distinguish between things indifferent and necessary, in the best manner he can. It is very remarkable, that the apostle John, who speaks most of the importance of charity and mutual love, hath also perhaps the strongest expressions of any on the hatefulness and danger of error. Thus he says in his second epistle, ver. 10. 11. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."

character and work of Chriſt; and if (as all ſuppoſe) his undertaking was available for their acceptance, why not of others alſo? On ſuch a queſtion, no doubt, modeſty and caution is highly commendable; and perhaps it were wiſe in ſome reſpects to ſuſpend the determination altogether. But there are caſes in which it comes neceſſarily to be conſidered: for inſtance, I do not ſee how it can be avoided, in ſpeaking of the importance or neceſſity of propagating the goſpel among the nations that know not God.

We may therefore obſerve, that the only juſt foundation of our hope in God, either for ourſelves or others, eſpecially as ſinners, is his promiſe. The firſt of theſe ought to be preciſely commenſurate to the laſt. In ſo far as it is defective, or falls ſhort of this meaſure, we are chargeable with unbelief; and in ſo far as it exceeds, with preſumption. Now, to whomſoever the true God is revealed in any meaſure, as merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, tranſgreſſion, and ſin; however obſcurely he points out the meritorious cauſe of pardon, if they believe his word, and accept of his mercy, they ſhall be ſaved; as we are told, Rom. iv. 3. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteouſneſs." As to any others, if they are in abſolute ignorance of the true God, we muſt ſay, that there doth not appear from ſcripture any ground on which to affirm, that the efficacy of Chriſt's death extends to them: on the contrary, we are expreſsly told, that "they have no hope*."

* See the forecited paſſage, Eph. ii. 12.

We find indeed in ſcripture, that the diſplay of divine perfection in the works of creation, and the conduct of Providence, is repreſented as rendering the heathens inexcuſeable in their contempt and neglect of God: Acts, xiv. 17. "Nevertheleſs he left not himſelf without witneſs, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs." Rom. i. 19. 20. "Becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them; for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; ſo that they are without excuſe." Should any deſire from theſe paſſages to infer, that if any of them made a juſt and dutiful uſe of theſe natural notices of God, he would not fruſtrate their ſearch, but would lead them to the ſaving knowledge of himſelf, I have nothing to object againſt the general poſition; but I am afraid it will be difficult to make any other legitimate uſe of this conceſſion than the apoſtle has made already, that "they are without excuſe" in their eſtrangement from God. One thing more we are authoriſed from ſcripture to ſay, that their guilt is in proportion to their means of knowledge; that they continue in their natural ſtate, and are not chargeable with the ſin of rejecting the goſpel which they never heard: Rom. ii. 12. "For as many as have ſinned without law, ſhall alſo periſh without law; and as many as have ſinned in the law, ſhall be judged by the law."

I PROCEED now to the *second* thing propoſed, which was, To make a few reflections on this ſcheme; and ſhew, that it is not only moſt ſelf-conſiſtent, but moſt agreeable to the other parts of ſcripture, as well as to the viſible ſtate of the world; and therefore that thoſe who, in reaſoning with infidels, depart from it in any meaſure, do thereby betray the cauſe which they profeſs to ſupport.

We have many proofs of the ingenuity and art of perſons under the power of prejudice, in evading the force, or wreſting the meaning of particular texts of ſcripture; and therefore it muſt ſerve much for the confirmation of any doctrine, that it is not only ſupported by expreſs paſſages, but agreeable to the ſtrain and ſpirit of the whole. That this is the caſe with the doctrine in queſtion, I might ſhew at great length: at preſent I content myſelf with the few following reflections.——

1. There is nothing more frequently or more undeniably found in ſcripture, than a celebration of the rich mercy and free grace of God in Chriſt Jeſus, in ſuch language as will ſcarce accord with any other plan than that which I have above endeavoured to explain and ſupport. It has been a remark frequently made, of the juſtice of which every ſerious peruſer of the ſacred writings will be ſenſible, that the inſpired penmen ſeem, as it were, to be raiſed and elevated above their ordinary pitch when they are on this theme, and that both in the Old and New Teſtament. Wherever there is a ſtriking paſſage in the poetic or prophetic writings, containing ſentiments of the moſt rapturous joy, or moſt ardent gratitude, there, we may be ſure, is a prophecy

of Chriſt. See the pſalmiſt David often thus diſtinguiſhing himſelf, particularly in the following paſſage: Pſal. lxxii. 17. 18. 19. "His name ſhall endure for ever: his name ſhall be continued as long as the ſun; and men ſhall be bleſſed in him: all nations ſhall call him bleſſed. Bleſſed be the Lord God, the God of Iſrael, who only doth wondrous things. And bleſſed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen."

The apoſtle Paul alſo, not only when expreſsly handling the ſubject, but even when he accidentally meets with it in the illuſtration of another argument, ſeems to fire at the thought, and either expatiates upon it with a profuſion of eloquence and energy of expreſſion, or collects, as it were, his whole force, and ſurpriſes us more, by diſpatching it at one ſingle maſterly ſtroke*.

Now, I would aſk, Why ſo many encomiums on the mercy and grace of God in pardoning ſinners through Chriſt, if his undertaking had not been abſolutely neceſſary for their recovery? Whence could ariſe ſo deep an obligation to gratitude, if our ſtate had not been abſolutely deplorable, or if relief could have been obtained from any other quarter? There muſt ſurely be a great impropriety in the ſcripture-language on this ſubject, when uſed by ſome perſons agreeable to their other ſentiments. And indeed their being very ſparing of this language, avoiding it as much as poſſible, and dwelling with moſt pleaſure on different themes,

* See an inſtance of the firſt of theſe, Eph. iii. 17.; and of the laſt, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

is a tacit confeſſion and acknowledgement of this truth.

But, beſides the mercy of God to the world in general, in ſending his Son to redeem us who were ſold under ſin, we find in ſcripture many ſtrong declarations of the infinite mercy of God, in ſending the tidings of ſalvation to thoſe who were ignorant of them before. This appears from ſeveral of the paſſages formerly cited, and many more that might be added. I only mention one of the apoſtle Paul, recorded in the Acts of the Apoſtles: Acts, xxviii. 28. "Be it known therefore unto you, that the ſalvation of God is ſent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." Now, what is meant by this? Were theſe Gentiles in a way of ſalvation before? and what benefit did they reap from this intelligence? If it be ſaid, that they were comparatively in a more advantageous ſituation than before; this, when ſtrictly examined, will be found to draw after it all the conſequences ſo diſagreeable to the pride of man, for which the other ſuppoſition is rejected. Or rather, when their comparative advantages are carried ſo far as to give any thing like a conſiſtent meaning to the above and other paſſages of ſcripture, it will amount entirely to the ſame thing. For I hope no Chriſtian will aſſert, that any perſon in the world, who hath the exerciſe of reaſon, is under a natural, but only a moral impoſſibility *, of co-

* I uſe the words Natural and Moral impoſſibility in the ſenſe in which they are uſed by the authors who firſt applied that diſtinction to ſubjects of philoſophy and divinity, and not in the abſurd ſenſe in which ſome late infidel writers do obſtinately perſiſt in uſing them. Theſe gentlemen,

ming to the knowledge, and doing the will of God. If the firſt were the caſe, it would take away all ſin; but the laſt is only ſuch an obſtinate diſinclination, as is ſtill conſiſtent with guilt and blame.

Another reflection we may make on this ſubject, That, according to the conſtant tenor of the holy ſcripture, not only an offer of mercy for Chriſt's ſake muſt be made to the ſinner, but a change muſt be wrought on his heart and temper, ſo great as to be termed a New Creation, and a Second Birth. The firſt of theſe is an act of the divine government, the laſt is a work of divine power. Now, I would beg leave to aſk, How and where is this to be expected? It cannot ſurely proceed from the influence of fabulous deities, or be the effect of idolatrous rites. It is not the work of man, and therefore only of the Spirit of Chriſt. Should any think fit to preſume, that the ſanctifying influences of the Holy Ghoſt are beſtowed univerſally, though unknown to the receivers; this again annihilates all the ſuperior advantages of Chriſtians; and, on the very beſt poſſible ſuppoſition, is an aſſertion

inſtead of meaning, by Natural or Phyſical neceſſity or impoſſibility, that which ariſes from the irreſiſtible operation of the laws of nature, and by Moral, a high degree of probability from concurring circumſtances, tell us, that Phyſical neceſſity is what ariſes from the laws of matter; and Moral, that which ariſes from the laws of mind or ſpirit. But nothing can be more evident, than that any influence from without upon mind or ſpirit, if it be irreſiſtible, is as much phyſical or natural neceſſity as any other. And the diſtinction thus explained, or perverted, is utterly uſeleſs, when applied to morals.

thrown out at random, and altogether deſtitute of ſupport from the oracles of truth.

A third obſervation I would make, That this ſcheme alone makes the foundation of the goſpel ſufficient to bear the ſuperſtructure. Nothing elſe can ſufficiently account for the coſt and expence, if I may ſpeak ſo, that have been laid out in the redemption of man. It is very evident, that both the prophets in the Old Teſtament, and the apoſtles in the New, are at great pains to give us a view of the glory and dignity of the PERSON of CHRIST. With what magnificent titles is he adorned! What glorious attributes are aſcribed to him! And what mighty works are ſaid to be done by him! All theſe conſpire to teach us, that he is truly and properly God, God over all, bleſſed for ever. On the other hand, how much is his humiliation and abaſement inſiſted on; the reproach and contempt of his life, the pain and ignominy of his death! and the infinite value of his ſufferings, ariſing from theſe two united conſiderations! Nothing can more plainly ſhew the guilt and miſery of man, than that ſo great a perſon ſhould be employed in reſcuing him, ſo infinite a price paid for his ranſom. If ſuch a propitiation was neceſſary for the heirs of glory, how hopeleſs muſt be the ſtate of thoſe who have no claim to, or intereſt in, or dependence upon it *!

* It is a ſtrong confirmation of this, that it holds almoſt without exception, in comparing the ſentiments and ſchemes of the different parties of Chriſtians, that thoſe who have the ſlighteſt ſenſe of the neceſſity of atonement, and the greateſt bias to a ſelf-righteous plan, are always moſt

The laſt obſervation I am to make at preſent is, That the ſcheme above laid down is alſo moſt agreeable to the viſible ſtate of the world, and furniſhes the plain and the only ſufficient anſwer to the old objection againſt the Chriſtian revelation, the want of univerſality. This aſſertion to ſome will appear ſurpriſing, as it ſeems to have been on purpoſe to avoid or anſwer this objection, that all the other opinions have been formed. However, they ſtill leave the objection in all its force; nay, it is often ſupported and ſtrengthened by the reaſonings upon them. But, on the principles above laid down, it is capable of the following plain and eaſy ſolution. It is of the infinite mercy and free grace of God, that he did not leave all mankind to periſh in a ſtate of ſin and miſery. Where, then, lies the difficulty in believing, that ſome only, and not all, are ſaved, or are furniſhed with the means of ſalvation? If all are juſtly liable to wrath, upon which the whole goſpel is built, mercy to a part can never be improbable, or unworthy of God, on account of the ruin of the reſt: ſo that the objection can only take its riſe from doubt or diſbelief of that firſt and fundamental truth.

If a prince had a number of traitors in his power, whoſe treaſon was of the moſt aggravated and inexcuſeable kind, and we ſhould be informed that he had granted a free pardon to ſome, and left the reſt to ſuffer the juſt puniſhment of their crime;

diſpoſed to leſſen the glory of our Redeemer's perſon; lean moſt to, or judge moſt favourably of, the Socinian or Arian hypotheſis.

would it be the leaſt objection againſt his clemency, that it extended only to a ſelect number of the offenders? or would it be any juſt impeachment of his management, or render the intelligence incredible, ſuppoſing the prince to be wiſe, as well as gracious? The caſe is preciſely the ſame with God. If it be but granted, that it is mercy extended to thoſe who eſcape, this abſolutely deſtroys the force of any objection that can be drawn from the number or circumſtances of thoſe that periſh.

There is in this reſpect a beautiful and inſtructive analogy between the courſe of divine providence, and the methods of divine grace; and much in both muſt be reſolved into the wiſdom and ſovereignty of God. There is an immenſe variety in the diſtribution both of natural advantages and ſpiritual bleſſings; and it is vain for us to expect that we ſhould be able to aſſign the whole, or indeed almoſt any, of the grounds either of the one or of the other. But if neither ſort is merited, if both are the effects of free undeſerved bounty, this cuts off all cauſe of complaint; and as to the difference which we obſerve in fact, particularly with regard to the laſt, we muſt be content to ſay, with the apoſtle Paul, Rom. xi. 32. 33. "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches, both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his judgements, and his ways paſt finding out!"

From theſe obſervations it will plainly appear, that departing from the principles above laid down,

is a very great injury to the cauſe of truth, and ſtrengthens that of infidelity. If they are founded upon the word of God, as I hope has been ſufficiently proved, then no good can poſſibly flow from ſoftening or diſguiſing them, in order to leſſen their oppoſition to the pride and prejudices of corrupt minds. Has ſuch conduct in fact leſſened the number of infidels, or reconciled them to the doctrine of Chriſt? On the contrary, have they not become more numerous, and more bold in their oppoſition to the goſpel, in proportion to the attempts that have been and are made to ſuit it to their taſte? Nay, have they not made uſe of innumerable paſſages from Chriſtian writers in ſupport of their own cauſe? For in all ſuch caſes, as Chriſtians ſpeak merely the language of natural religion, or magnify the preſent powers of the human mind, in order to rear up a ſelf-righteous ſcheme, they are conſidered by infidels, and juſtly, not as defending the goſpel with ſucceſs, but as yielding up the great point in debate, and coming over to their own party.

I PROCEED now to make ſome practical improvement of this ſubject. And, in the

1ſt place, From what hath been ſaid, you may ſee the real, the unſpeakable moment of propagating Chriſtian knowledge. It is, indeed, ſo far as it is cordially embraced, turning them "from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Theſe words have a deep and intereſting meaning, if underſtood as above, but not otherwiſe. Let us only ſuppoſe thoſe who deny or call in queſtion the abſolute neceſſity of ſalvation

through Chriſt, employed as miſſionaries in converting the Heathens: how cold, how ambiguous, and inconcluſive the arguments with which they would endeavour to preſs the change! But the view of it given above, muſt in the ſtrongeſt manner diſpoſe every ſerious perſon to ſupport ſuch a deſign, and powerfully animate to diligence thoſe who are employed in carrying it into execution.

It is allowed by all, that doing good and communicating happineſs, is the moſt excellent character; that promoting the intereſt of our brethren of mankind, is a natural fruit and expreſſion of our love to God, and an imitation of the divine benignity. But what compariſon is there between any acts of benignity that regard only the preſent life and the welfare of the body, and thoſe that affect the everlaſting intereſt of an immortal ſpirit? As far as God's redeeming grace is ſuperior to his providential care, ſo far muſt our ſincere and ſucceſsful endeavours to promote the ſalvation of the ſoul, excel any relief or help we can give to the wants of the body.

The laſt of theſe purpoſes, however, is often celebrated by infidels, in oppoſition to the other, which they delight in treating with deriſion and ſcorn. But as nothing can be more evident than its comparative excellence, ſuppoſing its reality; ſo there is not the leaſt contrariety between the two deſigns: ſo far from it, that they are ſtrongly connected together, and are always beſt promoted in conjunction. There may be indeed ſingle inſtances of perſons, from oſtentation or other falſe motives, parting with their goods to feed the poor, who have

no true love to God or their brethren. But in general, it is certain, that those who have "their treasure in heaven, who love not the world, nor the things of the world, (which, however hard a saying it may appear, is the real character of every Christian), will more easily communicate of what they possess to those who stand in need. True religion always enlarges the heart, and strengthens the social tie. Every believer must view his poor brethren in several endearing lights, as children of the same heavenly Father, as under the same original guilt, dependent on the same Saviour, and preparing for the same judgement; whereas wicked men, however various their characters, do habitually, by luxury and self-indulgence of some kind or other, feed their pride, increase their wants, and inflame their appetites. This not only gives them a narrow turn of mind, but often wastes their substance; and so necessarily obstructs their liberality, by taking away both the inclination and ability to bestow.

And as those who have a just concern for the everlasting interest of others, will be most disposed to relieve their present distresses; so the bounty of such will always be best directed, and followed with the happiest effects. They never separate the two great ends, of making men happy in this world, and heirs of eternal life; and will therefore have it as their chief care, to promote industry and sobriety in all whom they take upon them to supply. It is too often seen, that what is dignified with the finest names, and represented as the effect of generosity, humanity, and compassion, is wholly without merit

in the giver, pernicious and hurtful to the receiver. How many diſſolute livers are not covetous, only becauſe they are under the dominion of a contrary paſſion? In the mean time, what they beſtow, is either entirely thrown away by an indiſcriminate profuſion; or, as is more commonly the caſe, it is worſe than thrown away, being confined to the moſt worthleſs of all wretches, who are their aſſiſtants, or companions in their crimes. In oppoſition to this, a real Chriſtian, ſupremely governed by the love of God, will direct every action to his glory; and while compaſſion, ſtrengthened by a ſenſe of duty, excites him to deal his bread to the hungry, he will have a ſtill ſuperior ſolicitude to preſerve them from ſin. Inſtead of an injudicious ſupply of fuel to their luſt, which is eaſy to a ſlothful, and gratifying to a carnal mind, he will endeavour to fit them for heaven, by ſuitable inſtruction; and reſcue them from want and idleneſs in this world, by lawful induſtry.

Theſe two great purpoſes have been jointly promoted by the Society in Scotland for Propagating Chriſtian Knowledge. They have been promoted with a moſt laudable zeal and diligence, and with a ſucceſs fully equal to the means the ſociety are poſſeſſed or furniſhed with for carrying them on. The promoting of true religion, loyalty, and induſtry, in the Highlands of Scotland, was the firſt object of their care; and the importance of encouraging it has been recommended in the ſtrongeſt light on many former occaſions of this ſort, and is well known. But there is another part of their deſign, to ſpread the knowledge of Chriſt, the only

Saviour of ſinners, among the unenlightened Heathen nations. On this the ſubject of my diſcourſe leads me to ſpeak a little more particularly.

Of the importance of ſuch a deſign every one who believes the goſpel muſt be ſenſible. But, except the very reſtricted efforts of the ſociety, little or nothing has ever been attempted by the Britiſh nation. And is not God, in his righteous providence towards us at preſent, manifeſtly and ſeverely puniſhing us for this neglect? Are we not engaged in war with a potent and formidable neighbour, in which the Supreme Diſpoſer of all events hath viſibly written diſappointment on every one of our attempts? Did not this war take its riſe from the diſputed limits of our territories in America? And are not our colonies in that part of the world expoſed to the moſt cruel and mercileſs depredations? Are not families, which ought to be quiet and peaceable habitations, frequently alarmed in the ſilence of night by the cry of war; and the tendereſt relations often butchered in each other's preſence, and that by a people of a ſtrange language, while the weak mother and helpleſs infant can only lift a ſupplicating eye, but cannot aſk for mercy? Who, then, are the inſtruments of this cruelty? Muſt we not anſwer, Thoſe very Indians, a great part of whoſe territory we poſſeſs, and whom, with a contempt equally impolitic and unchriſtian, we ſuffer to continue in ignorance of the only living and true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom he hath ſent?

Such a particular interpretation of the language of providence may be thought bold; but there are

many circumſtances which, in a manner, conſtrain us to confeſs its propriety. We have been a nation early and long favoured with the light of divine truth, and are therefore bound to communicate it to others. That diſtant country was a refuge to many of our pious forefathers, when flying from the rage of eccleſiaſtic tyranny; and the territory either taken from or ceded to us by theſe people, has been the great ſource of wealth and power to this nation. But what ſeems chiefly to warrant this application is, that the care taken by our enemies to convert the Indians, is the chief, if not the ſingle, cauſe of their ſuperior intereſt among that people. Their free, independent manner of living, makes the Britiſh temper, character, and cuſtoms, in all other reſpects more agreeable to them. But being once converted, not to the Chriſtian faith, but to the Romiſh ſuperſtition, they are inviolably attached to the French intereſt. And that politic, but fraudulent nation, are able to cover and excuſe their own treacherous deſigns, by the ungovernable and ſavage barbarity of their Indian allies.

Can there be, therefore, a more noble, a more important, or more neceſſary exerciſe of Chriſtian charity, than enabling the Society to carry on their uſeful and ſalutary ſchemes, eſpecially to extend their miſſions to the Indian tribes? Who that knows the value of immortal ſouls, can refuſe to contribute his ſhare in promoting this excellent deſign? Who that fears the juſt judgement and diſpleaſure of God, can refuſe to take this ſtep, amongſt others, evidently neceſſary for averting his threatened vengeance? And who that loves

his Redeemer's name, but muſt deſire that it ſhould be adored from the riſing to the ſetting ſun? The boldneſs and activity of ſinners in ſpreading every ſpecies of corruption, ſhould excite an emulation in believers not to be behind hand in the ſervice of a much better maſter. Have we not ſeen much profane zeal diſcovered in ſupport of the moſt pernicious and criminal amuſements, which conſume time, enervate the body, and pollute the mind? And ſhall there not be a like concern to promote knowledge and holineſs in the uncivilized parts of our own country, and to carry the glad tidings of the goſpel of peace to thoſe who now ſit in darkneſs, and in the region and ſhadow of death? Are there not many to whom the name of a Saviour is precious, "even as ointment poured forth;" who burn with deſire, that the riches of divine grace, which can never be exhauſted, may be more largely diffuſed? And will not all ſuch chearfully and liberally contribute to extend the bounds of the Redeemer's kingdom, in the proſpect of that bleſſed time, when the knowledge of God ſhall cover the earth as the waters cover the ſea? or of that ſtill more glorious period, when every veſſel of mercy, from the eaſt, weſt, north, and ſouth, ſhall be gathered together, and ſit down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father?

I ſhall now conclude my diſcourſe, by preaching this Saviour to all who hear me, and intreating you, in the moſt earneſt manner, to believe in Jeſus Chriſt; for "there is no ſalvation in any other." This is far from being unneceſſary or impro-

per, even in an audience of profeſſing Chriſtians. Wherever there is a national profeſſion of the goſpel, there are always many who, though they retain the name of Chriſtians, are ſtrangers to real faith in Chriſt, or union with God through him; nay, who in their hearts are enemies to the truth in its ſimplicity and purity. It is in vain to attempt, by reaſoning, to bring men to an acknowledgement of the truth of the Chriſtian doctrine in ſpeculation, unleſs we alſo bring them to ſuch a perſonal conviction of their guilt and wretchedneſs, as will make them receive the information of Chriſt's character and work, as glad tidings to their own ſouls. No other converts receive any benefit themſelves by the change; nor are they of any ſervice to Chriſt and his cauſe, except ſo far as they are over-ruled by the ſovereign providence of that God who only can "bring good out of evil."

Wherefore, my beloved hearers, be perſuaded, from the word of God, which you profeſs to believe, from the ſtate of the world, which you may ſee, and of your own hearts, which you may feel, that you are by nature wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked. You are ſo far from having ſuch a conformity to the pure and perfect law of God, in your thoughts, words, and actions, and the principles from which they ought to flow, as can entitle you to his favour, that the imaginations of your hearts are only evil from your youth, and that continually. Whatever imaginary ſchemes of a virtuous character you may reſt or glory in, you are wholly unable to ſtand the trial of God's impartial judgement. O! how

hard is it to convince men of sin, even while the earth groans under their guilt! Would but those who are most apt to boast of the dignity of their nature, and the perfection of their virtue, make an exact register of all the thoughts that arise in their minds; there remains still as much of the law of God written upon their hearts, as would judge them out of their own mouths. Instead of being able to bear that such a record should be exposed to public view, they could not even endure themselves to peruse it: for self-flattery is their ruling character, but self-abhorrence would be the effect of this discovery. Ought you not, therefore, to be ready to acknowledge, that you are altogether as an unclean thing, and unable to stand before God if he enter into judgement? But whether you acknowledge it or not, I bear from God himself this message to you all, that whatever may be your character, formed upon worldly maxims, and animated by ambitious and worldly views, if you are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, if you are not clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness, you must for ever perish.

But, behold, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. There is a fulness of merit in his obedience and death to procure your pardon. There is no sin of so deep a dye, or so infectious a stain, but his blood is sufficient to wash it out. This is no new doctrine, or modern discovery, to gratify a curious mind. Perhaps you have heard such things so often, that you nauseate and disdain the repetition. But they are the words of eternal life, on which your souls' salvation abso-

lutely depends; and therefore, though this call ſhould come but once more to be rejected, it is yet again within your offer; and as "an ambaſſador "from Chriſt, as though God did beſeech you by me, I pray you in Chriſt's ſtead be ye reconciled unto God." You have heard the danger of all who are without Chriſt; but I beſeech you remember the aggravated guilt, and the ſuperior danger of thoſe who continue obſtinate under the goſpel. All the mercy that is ſhewn to ſinners in the offer, ſhall inflame the charge againſt them in the great day, if they are found impenitent. Mercy and juſtice are never ſeparated in any part of the goſpel-plan. They illuſtrate each other in the contrivance, they ſhine together on the croſs, and they ſhall be jointly manifeſt in the day of judgement. Shall not the blood of Chriſt, which is ſo powerful in its influence for taking away the guilt of thoſe who truſt in it, greatly add to the guilt and danger of thoſe who deſpiſe it? Pſal. ii. 10. 11. 12. "Be wiſe now, therefore, O ye kings," and all of every rank; "be inſtructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiſs the Son, leſt he be angry, and ye periſh from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: bleſſed are all they that put their truſt in him."

AN

INQUIRY

INTO THE

SCRIPTURE MEANING

OF

CHARITY.

IN a note in the ſermon on Acts, iv. 12. "Neither is there ſalvation in any other," the reader will find that I have intimated two things: 1. That if a favourable judgement of opinions of others, be the ſcripture-meaning of *charity*, then certainly ſome bounds muſt be ſet to it; and it muſt be praiſe or blame worthy, according to the caſes in which it is exerciſed. 2. That I am inclined to think that this is not the meaning of the word in ſcripture; but that it means an ardent and unfeigned love to others, and a deſire of their welfare, temporal and eternal; and may very well conſiſt with the ſtrongeſt abhorrence of their wicked principles, and the deepeſt concern for their dangerous ſtate. At the ſame time it was hinted,

that this ſubject deſerved a more diſtinct and full illuſtration. I was ſufficiently aware, even at the time of writing, that this declaration would bring down upon me the high diſpleaſure of certain perſons. And ſo indeed it happened, to ſuch a degree, that ſome, according to their wonted candour, and (in their own ſenſe) moſt charitable interpretation, have affirmed, that I had in that paſſage openly declared againſt charity. This hath induced me, on notice of a ſecond edition being intended, to offer a few reflections on this ſubject; which I hope ſhall be conducted in as cool and critical a manner, as can in reaſon be deſired, that I may not offend againſt charity, even when writing upon the ſubject.

Let me begin by ſettling preciſely the ſubject of the inquiry. It will, or at leaſt ought to be, acknowledged, that with many the current meaning of the word *charity* is, to have a favourable opinion of the ſentiments of others, who are ſuppoſed to differ from us; that is to ſay, (for it is not very eaſy to define it clearly), to think that they are innocently miſtaken in judgement, and that they have as honeſtly inquired after truth as ourſelves; and therefore to conclude, that as perſons truly ſincere, and acting according to their light, they ſhall meet with the final acceptance of God. That this is the meaning with many, if it ſhould be denied, I prove from the following circumſtance, that charity in ſentiment, or charity in general, (except when it is taken in a limited ſenſe, as ſignifying bounty to the poor), is always applied to thoſe who

differ from us, and never to thoſe who agree with us; and indeed it is about the difference that it is ſuppoſed to be exerciſed.

1. Now, the *firſt* thing I obſerve upon this is, that if the above be the ſcripture-meaning of charity, then certainly ſome bounds muſt be ſet to it; and it muſt be praiſe or blame worthy according to the caſes in which it is exerciſed. I make this ſuppoſition, becauſe, though it is propoſed in the courſe of theſe remarks to ſhew, that the above is not the ſcripture-meaning of the word; yet there is really, within certain limits, a duty of this kind preſcribed to us in ſcripture, but never called *charity*. The duty I mean is mutual forbearance, and guarding againſt raſh judgement; but it is remarkable, that neither in the deſcription of this duty, nor in the arguments urging to the practice of it, is the word *charity*, or the neceſſity of charity, ever once introduced*. The proper objects of forbearance are matters of indifference, or rather matters of comparatively ſmall moment; and the ſin of raſh judging conſiſts in believing things to be of more moment than they are, and attributing out-

* I do not know whether I ſhould call it an exception from this, that in one paſſage, when the apoſtle Paul is ſpeaking of the oppoſite ſins, of judging others on the one hand, or deſpiſing them on the other, he introduces walking charitably. But it is in a ſenſe quite oppoſite to what it would have been uſed in by one pleading for the modern charity. It is not the man who judges raſhly that he charges with uncharitableneſs, but him who deſpiſeth his weak brother, and is at no pains to avoid giving offence: Rom. iv. 15. "But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkeſt thou not charitably. Deſtroy not him with thy meat for whom Chriſt died."

ward actions or expreſſions to bad motives or principles, without neceſſity. I ſay, without neceſſity; becauſe it is allowed by every judicious and accurate writer upon raſh judging, that a perſon cannot be chargeable with this ſin, merely for thinking ill of another's temper or practice, upon clear and irreſiſtible evidence. To do otherwiſe, in many caſes, is either wholly impoſſible, or argues a weakneſs of underſtanding; which cannot be the object of approbation, nor conſequently of imitation.

Let us therefore ſuppoſe, that this duty of forbearance, which indeed I take to be wholly diſtinct in its nature, is the charity ſo ſtrongly recommended, and ſo highly applauded in ſcripture, and that it is to be exerciſed with regard to the opinions of others: In that caſe it muſt have certain bounds, for the following reaſons.

1. If it were otherwiſe, we ſhould then either want a meaning for many declarations and precepts in ſcripture; or, which is worſe, ſhould perceive them to be evidently abſurd and ill founded. That I may not tire the reader, I ſhall not adduce the tenth part of what is ſaid on this ſubject in ſcripture; but muſt beg of him to weigh the following paſſages, and to make ſome reflections on their manifeſt purpoſe: Jude, v. 3. 4. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common ſalvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye ſhould earneſtly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the ſaints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condem-

nation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lafciviouſneſs, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jeſus Chriſt." Here I think is plainly a duty with regard to opinions, altogether different from that of forbearance. The one requires us not ſo much as to judge our brethren; the other requires us to contend earneſtly with them. The one ſuppoſes the trifling difference to be wholly buried; the other implies, that it ſhould be kept clearly in view, and all poſſible pains taken to ſupport the truth, and to refute the error. The one ſuppoſes entire peace and union; the other implies a firm and reſolute oppoſition, ſo as to come to no terms which imply conſent or approbation. The phraſeology through the whole paſſage teaches us to interpret it as I have done: "There are certain men," ſays he, "crept in unawares;" plainly ſignifying, that if they had not crept in ſecretly, they would not, or ought not, to have been ſuffered to come in openly. Now, if charity and forbearance be the ſame thing, here are ſome perſons deſcribed, whom we are not to forbear, and conſequently for whom we are to have no charity: therefore it muſt have ſome limitation. Let it be as extenſive as you will, it is not boundleſs.

Titus, i. 10. 11. 13. "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, eſpecially they of the circumciſion: whoſe mouths muſt be ſtopped, who ſubvert whole houſes, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's ſake. Wherefore, rebuke them ſharply, that they may be ſound in the faith." Now, let me ask any unprejudiced reader, whether ſharp rebuke be not a very diffe-

rent thing from forbearance? How can you rebuke thoſe whom you may not ſo much as judge? or why ſhould you attempt to make them ſound in the faith, if they are already received of God? as it is expreſſed, Rom. xiv. 3. Beſides, what is the meaning of ſubverting whole houſes? and of ſtopping the mouths of the falſe teachers, to prevent or remedy this ſubverſion? In the ſame epiſtle, chap. iii. 10. the apoſtle ſays, "A man that is an heretic, after the firſt and ſecond admonition, reject." Does not this ſuppoſe, that it is poſſible for a man to be a heretic? Does not the apoſtle here ordain a ſentence of expuliſion to be paſſed againſt him, after the pains taken to reclaim him appear to be fruitleſs? It is plain, therefore, that if charity be the ſame with forbearance, it muſt have limits; for if every body muſt be forborne, then certainly nobody can be expelled.

I muſt not here paſs by an aſtoniſhing interpretation put by ſome, and men of learning too, upon the following verſe of the ſame chapter: "Knowing that he that is ſuch, is ſubverted and ſinneth, being condemned of himſelf;" that is, ſay ſome, no man is an heretic in the ſenſe of this paſſage, but who is ſelf-condemned, or is acting contrary to his own conviction; ſo that he muſt be rejected, not for the error of his judgement, but for the obſtinacy and depravation of his heart. I do not remember to have ſeen any ſtronger inſtance of the power of prejudice, than giving ſuch a ſenſe to the word *ſelf-condemned*. If any man can really conceive a caſe in his own mind, of a heretic obſtinately perſiſting in his error, and ſuffering for it,

in oppoſition to his own inward conviction, and at the ſame time this circumſtance clearly aſcertained as the foundation of his ſentence, I wiſh he would teach me how to conceive it: at preſent it ſeems to me utterly impoſſible. If any perſon thus ſpeaks lies in hypocriſy, is it to be ſuppoſed, that he will confeſs it? and if he do not confeſs, how is it poſſible to prove it? The plain meaning of being condemned of himſelf, in this paſſage, is, that his errors are ſo contradictory to the other articles of his faith, ſuch an abjuration of his former profeſſion, and generally tend ſo much to immorality in practice, that he is condemned as it were out of his own mouth.

In the 2d epiſtle of John, the apoſtle ſays, ver. 9. 10. 11. "Whoſoever tranſgreſſeth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Chriſt, hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine of Chriſt, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your houſe; neither bid him God ſpeed: for he that biddeth him God ſpeed, is partaker of his evil deeds." I ſhall not ſtay to examine nicely the import of not receiving ſuch a one into our houſe, and not bidding him God ſpeed. It is ſufficient for my purpoſe, that no ſenſe can be put upon it low enough to make it agreeable to the treatment we ought to give to our brethren whom we are forbidden to judge. Theſe we are to receive, as Chriſt hath received them, and to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To all theſe I only add, without any reflection upon it, the reproof of Chriſt to the church of

Pergamos: Rev. ii. 14. "But I have a few things againſt thee, becauſe thou haſt there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to caſt a ſtumbling-block before the children of Iſrael, to eat things ſacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So haſt thou alſo them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

2. If charity be the ſame with forbearance, it muſt have limits, or it would be the ſtrongeſt impeachment of divine wiſdom and goodneſs, in not giving marks ſufficiently clear to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood. If we are to entertain a favourable opinion of the ſentiments and ſtate of others, it muſt be entirely founded on the ſuppoſition, that they have inquired with honeſty and impartiality; and that they are not blinded by prejudice or corrupt paſſions. This, I ſuppoſe, will be readily allowed, becauſe it is the uſual way of ſpeaking or writing on the ſubject. 'They may be miſtaken,' it is often ſaid, 'but without their fault: they may have freely and impartially inquired, and yet may, after all, think differently with equal ſincerity.' This, I contend, can only hold in matters of ſmall moment, and in themſelves of a doubtful nature; and in theſe, the obſervation is juſt, and correſponds with reaſon, ſcripture, and experience. But in truths of the higheſt moment, if there are any ſuch at all, to ſuppoſe that men equally ſincere and impartial, may, notwithſtanding, have ſentiments directly oppoſite, ſeems to me an impeachment of divine wiſdom. How can it be, unleſs the evidences for and againſt them, be pretty equally balanced? How is the judgement determined at all, but by a ſort of

compound *ratio*, to ſpeak in the language of mathematicians, of the outward evidence, and the prepoſſeſſion of the mind? Strong prepoſſeſſions will account for any opinion, however abſurd; but if two perſons of equal capacity, and equal integrity, draw oppoſite concluſions on any queſtion, it muſt certainly ariſe from the doubtfulneſs of the queſtion itſelf. Now, if there be any truths of moment not attended with ſufficient evidence, how can we acquit or juſtify the conduct of providence? There does not ſeem to me to be any alternative; but we muſt lay the blame, either upon the evidence or the mind; that is to ſay, in other words, it muſt be put to the charge either of God or man.

3. If charity is the ſame thing with forbearance, it muſt have ſome limits; otherwiſe the value of truth itſelf is abſolutely annihilated. If I am to believe a man in as ſafe a ſtate, and as much accepted of God, in one opinion as another, upon all ſubjects, it is plain, not only that every truth is of equal moment with another, but that truth and error are of equal value. This, I think, is indiſputable; for if it makes no difference, either in point of character or ſtate, I ſee nothing elſe from which their value can be eſtimated. What, then, becomes of all the fine encomiums we have on the beauty, the excellence, the importance of truth? the neceſſity and benefit of freedom of inquiry? It would be much better to be ſatisfied with any opinions, be they what they will, than to give way to doubts and ſuſpicions, to fatigue our minds, and waſte our time in long and difficult reſearches. If it be ſaid, that they may be the ſame as to the ſin-

cerity of the inquirer, but different principles may have different effects in practice; this is yielding up the point in debate: for if one opinion leads to holineſs, and another to wickedneſs in practice, they can never be in the ſame ſtate of ſafety, nor equally acceptable to God, who hold theſe oppoſite ſentiments. Beſides, it is common with the advocates for this miſtaken ſort of charity, in order the better to ſupport their opinion, to deny this difference in effect, and to ſay, 'It is no matter what a man's opinions are, if his life be good.' Now, it is evident, that this aſſertion is abſurd; or rather the ſuppoſition is impoſſible, unleſs the influence of truth and falſehood upon the life be abſolutely equal. Grant but the leaſt ſuperiority or advantage to one above the other, and the argument is deſtroyed; for if truth be better than falſehood, it muſt be ſome matter what a man's opinions are, in order to his life's being good. How weak and inconſiſtent creatures are we! The very ſame perſons who make the greateſt ſtir about a pretended ſearch after truth, and freedom of inquiry, will needs have it, that Chriſtian charity implies, that all opinions are alike, and ought to be treated with equal reſpect: and then, to crown all, they give us the more hideous picture of the terrible effects of ſuperſtition, and certain religious ſentiments which they are pleaſed to condemn. Alas! where is the charity then? Are all opinions equal? Is it no matter what a man's opinions are, if his life be good? At laſt you have found out ſome, whoſe lives are ill by the impulſe of their opinions.

Certainly, charity, in the ſenſe of forbearance or approbation, is not due to them.

4. If charity is the ſame with forbearance, it muſt have ſome limits; becauſe otherwiſe things would be carried to an extravagant length; and ſuch caſes might be ſuppoſed as very few would be willing to admit, and indeed I think no man can rationally admit. I might give a multitude of poſſible examples; but, for the greater ſatisfaction of the reader, ſhall only mention a few that are real.

(1.) Within the Chriſtian church, there are not only different, but oppoſite opinions, and mutually deſtructive of each other. Thoſe who hold them, on each ſide, not only ſay, but think, that their adverſaries are guilty of impiety and blaſphemy. Let us take for inſtance, the Calviniſts and Socinians. Read the writings of the firſt, and you will ſee, that they conſider their adverſaries as taking away the very foundation of the goſpel, denying the only Lord God that bought them, and as guilty of groſs idolatry in giving divine worſhip to one whom they believe to be a creature. Again, if you read the writings of the laſt, you will find them charging their adverſaries with blaſphemy of the moſt horrible nature, and not only making a God different from the true God, but ſuch a one as is more cruel and vindictive than the very devils. Now, I deſire to know how the one of theſe ſorts of perſons can have a favourable opinion of the ſtate and ſentiments of the oppoſite, without renouncing their own? I do freely acknowledge, as I have formerly done, that I never did eſteem the Soci-

nians to be Chriſtians; and yet find nothing more eaſy, or indeed more neceſſary, than to have charity for them, in what I take to be the ſcripture ſenſe of that word. But in the modern ſenſe it appears to me utterly impoſſible. For the very ſame reaſon, if any who had embraced theſe principles, ſhould pretend that he had ſuch charity for me, as to eſteem and receive me as a faithful miniſter of Chriſt, I would conſider it as a profeſſion altogether hypocritical, or that he did not believe a word of his own ſyſtem. The truth is, I cannot help thinking, from the manner of conducting theological controverſies, that it is very common for many to plead for that charity to themſelves which they never give to their adverſaries; while the power of prejudice hinders them from obſerving the inconſiſtency between their reaſoning and practice *.

(2.) Thoſe who deny and oppoſe the goſpel altogether, have juſt the ſame title to our charity; and we are obliged to believe, that they are honeſt and impartial inquirers, and therefore accepted of God. Now, if there be any thing in the world

* I could give many inſtances of this ſurpriſing inadvertency in writers of the very firſt character: I ſhall only mention one, of the renowned Earl of Shafteſbury. His darling theme is, to ſhew, that every thing whatever is for the general good; that even the worſt men are guided at bottom by a benevolent principle; yet even while expatiating on the goodneſs of the whole ſyſtem of beings, he takes every opportunity of falling upon the clergy, whom he allows to be purely evil, without containing any good, or tendency to promote it: a defect in his own ſcheme, to which he does not ſeem to have attended.

clear from ſcripture, it is, that we are not to approve or receive ſuch perſons; that they are not the objects of forbearance; and, by conſequence, not of that charity that conſiſts in forbearance: on the contrary, the zeal and activity of the apoſtles was wholly employed in bringing unbelievers to the knowledge and confeſſion of the truth; for which they deſerve very little praiſe, if their ſtate was ſafe, and their character unexceptionable, before. And as to perſons among us denying the goſpel, after examination, I do not ſee how any perſon can think them impartial in rejecting it, without a very poor opinion of the evidence for receiving it.

(3.) Even in point of morals, there have been, and are at this time, opinions ſo very groſs, that few will look upon the ſtate of thoſe who hold them as ſafe; and yet, if forbearance is charity, and the charity is unlimited, they muſt alſo be taken in. There have been ſeveral, who certainly were ſincerely of opinion, that fornication and other uncleanneſs, was lawful. So great a man as David Hume, Eſq. has adopted a ſentence from a French writer; "Female infidelity, when it is known, is a ſmall matter; and when it is not known, it is nothing." The very ſame writer ſeems alſo either to defend, or greatly to alleviate, unnatural luſt. And many highwaymen have actually reaſoned themſelves into an opinion of the lawfulneſs of robbery, by alledging, that God never made the world with this view, that ſome ſhould have too much, and others ſhould ſtarve; and therefore they had a right to a ſhare, and might levy it wherever they could find it. The truth is, there are more of theſe

groſs and erroneous opinions than many are aware of; for men are ſeldom at eaſe on the commiſſion of ſin, till they have found ſome way to ſatisfy their own minds, by wrong principles. Well, are we to think all theſe honeſt and impartial inquirers, and to have charity for them in the ſenſe ſo often mentioned? I imagine ſome will at laſt ſtop ſhort, and ſay, there is a diſtinction to be made; theſe opinions are formed by the influence of prejudice, and the bias of corrupt affections. Here, then, your charity fails, and you have ſet limits to your forbearance; or rather you have given up the cauſe; for all falſe opinions ariſe from the bias of corrupt affections. The fallacy of the whole arguments on this ſubject lies in confounding two things very different, viz. a man's being truly of an opinion, and his being ſo upon fair and unprejudiced inquiry; a train of reaſoning carried on, which is built upon the laſt of theſe ſuppoſitions, and applied to caſes where only the firſt takes place. Perhaps ſome may chooſe to ſay, as to the caſe of immoral opinions, that men are not to be diſapproved or condemned for the opinion in itſelf, but for preſuming to act in conſequence of it. To which I anſwer, That if any man will prove the innocence of forming ſuch opinions, I will undertake to prove, with at leaſt equal evidence, the obligation that lies upon every one ſo perſuaded, to act according to his light.

5. In the *laſt* place, to ſuppoſe that charity is the ſame thing with forbearance, and yet that it is unlimited, is ſelf-contradictory, and impoſſible, in many inſtances, to be put in practice. True Chri-

ſtian charity being the indiſpenſable duty of all, muſt at leaſt be poſſible to all, and conſiſtent with every other duty. Now, to believe the ſafety of the ſtate, or the goodneſs of the character, of many perſons for whom charity is pleaded, may be to ſome abſolutely impoſſible. They may have a conviction of the contrary in their judgment. They may think, that the ſcripture clearly and explicitly commands them to ſeparate from ſuch people, to oppoſe and deteſt their errors; and ſurely there are many much more abſurd and groundleſs opinions truly entertained. What then ſhall they do? The ſcripture commands them to contend with erroneous perſons; and if they do not, they are guilty of a breach of charity, one of the moſt eſſential of all goſpel-duties; for the apoſtle tells us, "Though I ſpeak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as ſounding braſs, or a tinkling cymbal."

Thus, I hope, it has been proved, to the ſatisfaction of all impartial perſons, that if charity, in ſcripture, is the ſame thing with that forbearance we owe to others who differ from us, it muſt have ſome bounds, and be praiſe or blame-worthy, according to the caſes in which it is exerciſed. If it be aſked, Who ſhall ſtate the bounds beyond which it is not to extend? I anſwer, Every one for himſelf, according to the beſt of his own judgment. Some perhaps will contend with or judge others, for things in which they ought to forbear them; but many others will carry their forbearance too far, and retain erroneous or vicious perſons in their ſociety, when they ought to expel them. For this

there is no remedy, as it is the conſequence of the weakneſs of human nature, and no way different from what happens as to every duty incumbent on us as men or Chriſtians.

II. LET us now come to the ſecond part of this diſcourſe, and conſider what reaſon there is to believe, that charity, in ſcripture, is a duty altogether diſtinct from forbearance, and founded on diſtinct principles.

One general conſideration will go nigh to prove this of itſelf, viz. That forbearance, as has been ſhewn in the preceding pages, hath limits, beyond which it is culpable; whereas charity hath none, at leaſt as to its object. There is no perſon or character that can be conceived, for which we are allowed to be without charity. With reſpect to forbearance, the object of it is clearly pointed out in the paſſages where it is ſpoken of, and is the difference of opinion as to ſmaller matters, viz. the lawfulneſs or unlawfulneſs of meats and drinks, and whether certain days were holy or common. But there is no paſſage in which charity is ſpoken of, that gives the leaſt hint, or indeed that leaves room to ſuppoſe, that it hath any limits as to its object. Charity, we are told, is "the end," or ſum "of the commandment." And indeed it is the ſame thing with love, which is the fulfilling of the law. And in the explication which our Lord gives us of the ſum of the ſecond table of the law, in anſwer to that queſtion, Who is my neighbour? he plainly teaches us, by the parable of the Samaritan, that all men are our neighbours. There was a great

oppoſition, in point of religion, between the Jews and Samaritans; yet he ſhews plainly, that this ought not to obſtruct the exerciſe of charity, in the true ſenſe of that word. For this reaſon, I think it highly probable, that forbearance is different from charity; the one points out our duty to our fellow-Chriſtians in certain circumſtances, and the other includes our duty to our fellow-creatures at all times.

This will be confirmed, by reflecting that the word which, in ſome places, is tranſlated *charity*, is the ſame, in all other paſſages, without variation in any one of them, with that which is tranſlated *love*. Αγαπη is the New-Teſtament word for *charity*, which, as it is generally tranſlated *love*, ſo I do not ſee the leaſt reaſon for altering the tranſlation, in thoſe places where charity is ſubſtituted in its room. Charity, then, is *love*; that is to ſay, it is a ſincere and fervent affection to others, and a deſire of their welfare, temporal and eternal. This not only may conſiſt with, but of itſelf naturally produces, the ſtrongeſt abhorrence of their wicked principles, and the deepeſt concern for their dangerous ſtate. There is a great affinity between the ſentiments we ought to entertain with regard to error and vice. Our love to vicious perſons ought not to carry in it any approbation or indulgence of their vices, and far leſs any belief of the ſafety of their ſtate; but an earneſt concern to bring about their reformation. In the ſame manner, a ſincere and fervent charity for erroneous perſons, does not imply any approbation of their opinions, or ſuppoſition of their conſiſtency with ſoundneſs in the faith, but an

earneſt deſire to recover them, if poſſible, from their unhappy deluſion. Nay, though a man be ſo narrow minded, as to judge thoſe whom he ought to forbear, it may very poſſibly be attended with no breach of charity; becauſe there may be as much love to his neighbour in that perſon's heart, and as much concern for his welfare, as if he had ſeen more clearly his own miſtake. The apoſtle Paul calls theſe *weak* perſons, and aſcribes their conduct to the imperfections of their judgement. It was the ſtrong, or thoſe who had more knowledge, that he blamed, as not walking *charitably*, when they would not abſtain from meat, to prevent their brethren's offence.

It will be an additional confirmation of this meaning of *charity*, that it makes the ſeveral duties of Chriſtians at once clear and intelligible, and conſiſtent one with another, by leaving to each its full ſcope, and its proper object. If we take *charity* in the ſenſe which I have rejected, there will be a continual oppoſition between zeal and charity; and in proportion as you increaſe in any one of them, you muſt neceſſarily fail in the other. And indeed this ſeems to be verified in experience; for thoſe who eſpouſe this ſort of charity, do frequently fall into ſo cool a ſtate in point of zeal, that they give themſelves little trouble, either in inſtructing the ignorant, or reproving the vicious; and are not backward in ſtigmatizing thoſe, as narrow-minded and uncharitable, who do. But if we take charity for unfeigned love, then, inſtead of oppoſition, there is the moſt perfect harmony between one duty and another. So far from hindering, or

even limiting each other in their exercise, they strengthen each other in principle, and direct each other in their application. The more fervent love I have for my fellow-creatures and my fellow-Christians, it will but excite my zeal to promote their benefit, by endeavouring to convince them of any dangerous mistake, and deliver them from the dominion of every vicious practice. At the same time, this love will naturally produce forbearance, where it is lawful and proper; because, if I love any person sincerely, I will judge of him candidly, and not impute any bad sentiment or practice to him without necessity. It will prevent us from interfering with others where we ought not, and will urge us to activity and diligence where the case seems really to call for it.

This subject may be well illustrated by parental affection, when it is both strong in its principle, and well directed in its exercise. It will certainly prevent a parent from judging hardly of his children, or being easily incensed against them, on wrong or doubtful information: but it will be so far from making him think favourably of their mistakes, either in principle or practice, that the more tender his love, the greater his concern to prevent their being misled, or to recover them if they have gone astray. Examples, to be sure, there are many, of a sort of love in parents to their children, that operates like the false charity I am now pleading against, making them blind to their failings, and even partial to their crimes: but I think it must be allowed, that all such partiality and indulgence is a weakness, instead of a virtue, in the

parent, and is commonly a curſe, inſtead of a bleſſing, to the child. To have juſt apprehenſions of the ſeveral duties of the Chriſtian life, we muſt always conſider their relation to, and dependence upon one another. There are ſome ſins oppoſite to, and deſtructive of each other; but there is no truly good diſpoſition, that is not perfectly conſiſtent with, or rather that does not improve and ſtrengthen every other. It is remarkable, that in ſcripture the duties of reproof and correction are frequently attributed to love as their principle, not only in God, but in man: "Whom the Lord loveth he chaſtiſeth, and ſcourgeth every ſon whom he receiveth." "He that ſpareth the rod, hateth his ſon; but he that loveth him, chaſteneth him betimes." "Thou ſhalt not hate thy neighbour in thy heart; but ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke him, and not ſuffer ſin upon him."

Upon the whole, ſince this interpretation of charity is not only moſt agreeable to ſcripture, but moſt conſiſtent with itſelf, and with every other branch of the Chriſtian character, I hope it will be received, as leaſt ſo as to leſſen the cry of uncharitableneſs againſt thoſe who, from the united principles of love to God and man, think themſelves obliged to oppoſe the progreſs of groſs error. I plead for this only when they make uſe of juſt and lawful means, and act in a manner becoming Chriſtians, in meekneſs inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves. For though I have ſhewn, that true charity is as favourable to zeal as to forbearance, and to both alike in their proper place, I am ſen-

ſible that there may be zeal where there is little or no charity, and, in that caſe, it will ſhew itſelf in "wrath, ſtrife, ſeditions, hereſies." This happens chiefly when a weak perſon who judges raſhly, is alſo of an envious or malicious diſpoſition. The firſt of theſe may be ſometimes without the other; they may, however, alſo be joined in the ſame perſon; and then it will certainly be attended with "confuſion and every evil work." But when a deep ſenſe of the evil of departing from the faith to the perſons themſelves, and the danger of corrupt doctrine infecting the whole lump, induces any to ſtand up in defence of the truth, to oppoſe the introduction of erroneous teachers, or to attempt the expulſion of thoſe who have crept in unawares; let them be called unreaſonable if you pleaſe, and let their miſtake be pointed out, but I beg that they may not be abuſed and vilified as uncharitable. The reaſon of my requeſt is, that it is more than probable they do this from a ſtrong conviction, that they are obliged to it by the expreſs command of Chriſt. I declare this to be my own perſuaſion, after the moſt impartial ſearch of the ſcriptures of which I was capable; and certainly it is at leaſt poſſible, that we may have, notwithſtanding, a fervent love to our brethren, and a deſire of their welfare. We may love them as men, even when we cannot judge them to be ſaints; and we may love them as Chriſtians, even when we think they are in many things to be blamed; nay, I hope we may heartily forgive them as enemies, notwithſtanding all their bitterneſs and rancour againſt us.

But if, after all, this requeſt cannot be obtained; if we cannot alter our judgement, and they will ſtill inſiſt that we are therefore without charity, that is to ſay, without Chriſtianity; they muſt confeſs, that here is one opinion which they will not tolerate, and to which, in their own ſenſe, no charity is due.

SERMON XVI.

THE TRIAL OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH BY ITS MORAL INFLUENCE.

Preached at the opening of the Synod of Glaſgow and Ayr, October 9. 1759.

MATTHEW, vii. 20.

Wherefore, by their fruits ye ſhall know them.

EVERY one who hath any acquaintance with the writings of infidels, muſt know that there is no topic on which they inſiſt at greater length, or with more plauſibility, than the innumerable ſects and parties into which the Chriſtian world is divided. With what apparent triumph do they enlarge, on the contradictory tenets, which different perſons profeſs to found upon the ſame ſcriptures, their violent oppoſition one to another, and the great difficulty, or rather impoſſibility, of diſcovering truth, among ſo many, who pretend each to have the entire and excluſive poſſeſſion of it.

Having gone thus far, it is eaſy and natural to proceed one ſtep farther, and affirm, that the great plurality of every denomination, do not embrace religion in general, or the tenets of their own ſect in

particular, from rational or perſonal conviction, but from a blind imitation of others, or an attachment to one or a few diſtinguiſhed leaders, whoſe authority is ſtronger than all other evidence whatever. Thus is religion, at once, ſuppoſed true, and yet deſtroyed; that is to ſay, it is at one ſtroke, as it were, annihilated, in almoſt all who profeſs it; their opinions, whatever they are in themſelves, being no more than implicit faith and party-prejudice in thoſe who embrace them.

The ſame viſible ſtate of the world, which gives occaſion of triumph to the enemies of religion, gives often no ſmall uneaſineſs and anxiety to its friends, particularly to the beſt and moſt diſpaſſionate of every party. Serious and conſcientious perſons, when they reflect upon the diviſions that prevail, when they are witneſſes to the contention and mutual accuſation of different parties, are ready to be overwhelmed with melancholy upon the proſpect, as well as involved in doubt and perplexity, as to what courſe they themſelves ſhould hold. It is not uncommon to find perſons of every rank in this ſituation; not only thoſe of better education, who are able to take an extenſive view of the ſtate of things in this and in preceding ages, but alſo thoſe of leſs knowledge and comprehenſion, when any violent debates happen to fall within the ſphere of their own obſervation.

Theſe reaſons have induced me to make choice of the paſſage now read as the ſubject of diſcourſe at this time. It contains the rule to which our Saviour appeals in his controverſy with the Phariſees, and by which he, once and again, deſires that their

pretenſions may be judged. I apprehend from the context, that it is equally applicable to their characters and their principles, their integrity before God in their offices of teachers of others, and the ſoundneſs of their doctrine as to its effects upon thoſe who ſhould receive it. Theſe two things are, indeed, in a great meaſure connected together, or rather they are mutually involved in one another, though it is poſſible, and in ſome few caſes profitable, to make a diſtinction between them.

What is further propoſed, through the aſſiſtance of divine grace, in the proſecution of this ſubject, is,

I. To ſhew that the rule here given by our Saviour is the beſt that could have been given, and that it is ſufficient to diſtinguiſh truth from error.

II. That this is in fact the rule by which all good men, and indeed mankind in general, ſo far as they are ſincere, do judge of religious principles and pretenſions.

III. To conclude with ſome reflections on the ſubject, for the benefit both of miniſters and people.

In the *firſt* place, then, it is propoſed to ſhew, that the rule here given by our Saviour is the beſt that could have been given, and that it is ſufficient to diſtinguiſh truth from error. To lay a foundation for this, it will be neceſſary to begin by ſettling, in as preciſe a manner as poſſible, the meaning of the rule, and to what caſes it can be juſtly applied. "Ye ſhall know them by their fruits," ſaith our Saviour. That is to ſay, when any perſon aſſumes the character of a divine teacher, and propoſes any thing to your belief, as from God, ſee

whether its fruits be really ſuitable to its pretenſions: particularly you are to lay down this as a principle, that, as he is holy in his nature, every thing that proceeds from him muſt be holy in its tendency, and produce holineſs as its fruit. In proportion as you ſee this effect in him who teaches it, and thoſe who embrace it, ſo receive it as true, or reject it as falſe.

By laying down the rule in theſe terms, I do not mean to deny, that, when a revelation is firſt propoſed as from God, or when the credit of ſuch revelation in general is examined, miracles are a diſtinct and concluſive proof of a divine commiſſion. I am perſuaded that nothing is more vague and indeterminate, and at the ſame time a more manifeſt inverting the natural order of things, than to ſay with ſome, We muſt judge of the truth of a miracle by the nature of the doctrine in the ſupport of which it is wrought; and, if this laſt is worthy of God, we may then admit the honorary teſtimony of the mighty work in its behalf.—They do not attend to the great ignorance of man in all ſpiritual and divine things without revelation, and to the boldneſs of human pride, who ſpeak in this manner. I would rather include this as one of the proper fruits of a divine commiſſion to teach any new doctrine, that ſigns be given of a ſuperior power accompanying the prophet. Thus we ſee the Jews made this demand of our Saviour, John, vi. 30. "What ſign ſheweſt thou, then, that we may ſee and believe thee? What doſt thou work?" It is true, in ſome inſtances, when, after many miracles, they perſiſted in aſking new ſigns of their

own deviſing, he condemns their obſtinacy, and refuſes to gratify it. Notwithſtanding this, we find him often appealing to his works as an atteſtation of the truth of his miſſion: thus he ſays, John, xvi. 11. "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or elſe believe me for the very work's ſake." And elſewhere, John, xv. 24. "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had ſin: but now they have both ſeen, and hated both me and my Father." Agreeably to this, we find Nicodemus drawing the concluſion, John, iii. 2. "Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doſt, except God be with him."

There is no doubt, however, that this muſt be inſeparably joined with a purity of character, and ſanctity of purpoſe. When theſe are wanting, it gives the juſteſt ground of ſuſpicion, leads to the ſtricteſt examination of miraculous pretenſions, and will certainly end in the diſcovery of ſuch as are falſe. For this is the very excellence of the rule laid down by our Saviour, that, though reaſon may be very unfit to paſs an independent judgement upon truth and error, conſcience may, with little danger of miſtake, reject what is evil, and yield its approbation to what is good.

But what I have chiefly in view is, that ſuppoſing the truth of the goſpel in general, particular opinions and practices muſt be tried in this manner. As the goſpel is allowed on all hands to be a doctrine according to godlineſs, when differences ariſe, and each oppoſite ſide pretends to have the letter of the law in his favour, the great rule of

deciſion is, Which doth moſt immediately and moſt certainly, promote piety and holineſs in all manner of converſation? In this way every doctrinal opinion, every form of government, and every rite and practice in worſhip, may be brought to the teſt, and tried by its fruits.

As opinions, ſo characters, muſt be tried in the ſame manner. The truth of this, though deſerving particular mention, is included in, or but a part or branch of the other. To paſs a judgement on particular characters is of very ſmall moment, or rather a peremptory deciſion of this kind is both unneceſſary and improper, unleſs when it is of weight in a cauſe. It is only prophets and teachers that fall to be ſingly, or perſonally tried, becauſe they are ſuppoſed to exhibit, in their own practice, an example of the force and influence of their principles. If on them they have no effect that is good, there is not the leaſt pretence for inſiſting that others ſhould embrace them.

Nothing farther ſeems neceſſary by way of explication of this rule, ſave to obſerve from the context, that fair and plauſible pretences, either of opinions or characters, muſt be examined with particular care, as being moſt ready to deceive; and the trial muſt be more by facts than by reaſoning, as is implied in the very language uſed in the text, "By their fruits ye ſhall know them."

The excellency of this rule may be comprehended under the two following particulars: 1. Its certainty; 2. Its perſpicuity.

The firſt of theſe will admit of little diſpute. As God is infinitely holy in his own nature, every

discovery that he has made to any of his creatures, must carry this impression upon it, and have a tendency to promote holiness in them. And as this is manifestly the design of the sacred oracles, and that system of divine truth which they contain, every thing by way of opinion, or practice, that pretends to derive its authority from them, may lawfully be tried by this rule, Will it make us more holy than before?

It is of moment here to observe, that this rule hath a deep and solid foundation. It proceeds upon the supposition, that all natural are inferior to moral qualities; that even the noblest intellectual abilities are only so far valuable, as they are subservient to moral perfection; or, in other words, that truth is in order to goodness. It is not (as has been often said) in his Almighty power, his infinite wisdom, or the immensity of being, that the glory of God chiefly consists, but in his immaculate holiness and spotless purity. Each part of the divine character, indeed, derives a lustre from the other. It is the union of greatness and goodness, that makes him truly God. His moral excellence becomes infinite in value and efficacy by residing in an infinite object. But if it were possible to separate his natural perfection from his moral excellence, or could we suppose them joined to malignity of disposition, he would be the proper object, (let us speak it with reverence), not of supreme love, but of infinite detestation.

This is more than sufficient to support the order in which things are represented above, and show, that its moral influence is the proper touchstone and trial of religious truth. These doctrines only come

from God, which tend to form us after the divine image. Thus far, perhaps, all will allow it to be true; at leaſt the aſſertion is common. But be pleaſed to obſerve, that this neceſſarily ſuppoſes the ſure and infallible efficacy of real truth in promoting holineſs, and the inſufficiency of error and falſehood for this purpoſe. If theſe were not both alike certain, the rule would be equivocal and abſurd. If men by believing lies could attain to unfeigned goodneſs and true holineſs, then their moral effect could not in the leaſt ſerve to diſtinguiſh between truth and error. It is no leſs plain, that if ſo abſurd a ſuppoſition is admitted but for a moment, the value of truth is wholly deſtroyed, and no wiſe man will employ his time and pains in endeavouring to diſcover, to communicate, or defend it.

The other particular comprehended under the excellence of this rule, is its perſpicuity; that it is not only ſure and infallible in itſelf, but capable of an eaſy application by thoſe who have occaſion to uſe it. Here, if any where, there is room for doubt and diſputation. Here, it may be alledged, all the confuſion and uncertainty returns, which was before complained of, and for which a remedy was required. Men will ſtill differ in their opinions as to what is true goodneſs. Beſides, they will ſtill debate the ſincerity of many pretenſions, and the reality of many appearances; and as art and hypocriſy will always be uſed on the one hand, deluſion muſt be the unavoidable conſequence on the other.

This, however, is no more than the neceſſary conſequence of human imperfection. It cannot be denied,

and it may without any hesitation be confessed, that men are liable to err, and that many have erred in the application of this rule. But, who can from thence justly infer, that it is not of sufficient clearness to direct those who will honestly make use of it, and to lay the error of those who are misled entirely at their own door?

It pleased God to write his law upon the heart of man at first. And the great lines of duty, however obscured by our original apostacy, are still so visible as to afford an opportunity of judging what conduct and practice is, or is not agreeable to its dictates. It will be found from experience, that men are able to determine on this point, with far greater certainty than on any other subject of religion; that is to say, they can perceive the excellency of the end, when they are in much doubt about the means, in themselves, or separately considered.

Such authority hath natural conscience still in man, that it renders those who, in their own conduct, despise its reproofs, inexcuseable in the sight of God, Rom. i. 20.—ii. 14. But it is of importance in the present argument to observe, that every one is able to pass a far surer judgement on the moral character of another, than his own. The pollution of the heart brings a corrupt bias on the judgement, in a man's own case, and makes him palliate and defend those sins, to which he is strongly inclined, or of which he hath been already guilty: whereas, in determining the character of others, this bias is less sensibly felt. This is perhaps the true and only reason why any deference is paid to virtue as praise-worthy, by those who are

enemies to it in their hearts; or any public honour and reſpect given to the ſervice of God in the world, where ſo great a majority are evidently in the intereſts of another maſter.

One ſingular excellence of this rule is, its being the moſt univerſally intelligible. It is level to the capacity of men of all degrees of underſtanding. There is little difference, if any, in this reſpect, between the wiſe and the unwiſe, the learned and the ignorant. Perhaps this circumſtance alone ought to give it, in juſtice, the preference to every other teſt of religious truth. Religion is the concern of all alike; and therefore what relates to it ſhould be open to all. It was the character, and the glory of the goſpel, at its firſt publication, that it was preached to the poor. And by this it is ſtill diſtinguiſhed, not only from many or moſt falſe religions, but eſpecially from thoſe philoſophical ſpeculations, in which the enemies of all religion place their chief ſtrength. When we peruſe a ſyſtem or theory of moral virtue, the principles of which are very refined, or the reaſoning upon it abſtracted, and above the comprehenſion of the vulgar, it may be ingenious, but it carries in itſelf a demonſtration, that, becauſe it is unfit, it could never be intended for general uſe.

Here, then, lies the great advantage of the rule laid down by our Saviour. The bulk of mankind, thoſe of lower rank, and even thoſe among them of weakeſt or leaſt cultivated underſtanding, are able to judge of the effects of principles, or to ſee the beauty of an excellent character, when they are not able to examine a doctrine, or apprehend the

reaſoning upon which it is founded. The dictates of conſcience are often immediate and clear, when the deductions of reaſon are long and involved. To make intricate reſearches in theory, requires great natural abilities, which are the portion of very few: but to judge of a viſible character requires only an impartial ſenſe of right and wrong. Of this the plain man is as ſuſceptible as the moſt acute by nature, or the moſt enlightened by education. In God Almighty infinite knowledge and infinite holineſs are united; and we have reaſon to think that in their perfection they are inſeparable. But we know, by experience, that they do not bear an exact proportion to one another in inferior natures, at leaſt among ſinful creatures. There may be, and there often is, great virtue and goodneſs in a mean capacity, and great depravity in perſons of eminent abilities.

From theſe conſiderations it is plain, that this rule of trying a doctrine by its effects, as a tree by its fruits, may be applied by the meaneſt as well as the greateſt, and with as little danger of miſtake; perhaps it might have been ſafely affirmed, with leſs danger of miſtake. Great intellectual abilities, and great natural advantages of every kind, are very ready to ſwell the mind with pride and ſelf-conceit, than which no diſpoſition is in itſelf more odious in the ſight of God, or more unfavourable to the diſcovery of truth. This ſeems to be confirmed by experience; and it is plainly the view given us of our preſent ſtate in the holy ſcriptures. Thus the apoſtle Paul ſays, 1 Cor. i. 26.—29. "Ye ſee your calling, brethren, how that not many

wiſe men after the fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath choſen the fooliſh things of the world, to confound the wiſe; and God hath choſen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty, and baſe things of the world, and things which are deſpiſed, hath God choſen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no fleſh ſhould glory in his preſence." For the very ſame thing we find our bleſſed Redeemer adoring the depth and ſovereignty of divine Providence, in the following terms, Luke, x. 21. "In that hour Jeſus rejoiced in ſpirit, and ſaid, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou haſt hid theſe things from the wiſe and prudent, and haſt revealed them unto babes: even ſo, Father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy ſight."

Miſtakes, however, after all, there will be, and ſome differences even among the beſt; but, from this very circumſtance, I derive another great excellence of the above rule laid down, that it is not only the teſt of truth for a man's ſelf, but the meaſure of forbearance with regard to others. By carefully examining their fruits, men may not only be directed what to embrace, and what capital and fundamental errors wholly to reject, but alſo in what particulars to exerciſe mutual forbearance, and, though ſmaller differences ſtill ſubſiſt, to receive one another to the glory of God. If in any perſon or perſons, of whatever party, you perceive the ſpirit of true and undefiled religion, they are accepted of God, and ſhould not be condemned by you. This ought not, in juſtice, to induce you to approve

or embrace every one of their principles, or every part of their practice, of which perhaps you have seen or felt the bad tendency; yet should it engage you to love them with unfeigned affection as sincere, though in some measure mistaken, servants of our common Lord.

I hope it appears from the preceding observations, that this rule, of trying every principle or profession by its fruits, is the best that could have been given. It is certain and infallible in itself, and we are less liable to mistake in the use of it than of any other. There seems, indeed, to be an exact analogy between this rule in religious matters, and reason in our common and civil concerns. Reason is the best guide and director of human life. There is certainly an essential difference between wisdom and folly, in the nature of things. They are also sensibly opposite to one another in their extremes. Innumerable actions, however, there are, or modes of action, of a more doubtful and disputable nature, as to the wisdom or weakness of which hardly any two men would be entirely of the same opinion. Let the enemy of religion make the application, who denies its reality, because all good men are not of the same mind; or because there are different parties and professions, who oppose one another in some opinions and practices. He acts just the same part, as he who seeing the differences of judgment among men, upon almost every subject that falls under their deliberation, should renounce the use of reason, or deny that there is in nature any such thing.

We now proceed to the *second* thing propoſed, to ſhow, That the rule above explained and defended, is that by which, in fact, all ſerious perſons, and indeed mankind in general, ſo far as they are ſincere, do judge of religious principles and pretenſions.

By ſerious perſons, I underſtand all thoſe who are truly religious, in oppoſition to thoſe who have only a nominal and cuſtomary profeſſion. If we would ſpeak with preciſion, or reaſon in a juſt and concluſive manner, we muſt keep this diſtinction conſtantly in view. Nothing does more harm to any cauſe, than a treacherous friend, or boſom-enemy: and nothing does more hurt to the intereſt of religion, than its being loaded with a great number, who, for many obvious reaſons, aſſume the form, while they are ſtrangers to the power of it. The fallacy of almoſt all the reaſonings of infidels lies here. They conſider religion as anſwerable for all the hypocriſy of thoſe who profeſs it, and all the wickedneſs of thoſe who have not renounced the profeſſion; as if, in order to its being true, it muſt be impoſſible for any to counterfeit it. If that were the caſe, no thanks would be due to impartial inquiry. All colour of objection being taken away, the aſſent would not be yielded, but compelled. This, doubtleſs, the preſumptuous wiſdom of man ordinarily dictates; but according to the ſuperior wiſdom of God, "offences muſt come" and "hereſies alſo, that they that are approved may be made manifeſt."

Suppoſing, therefore, the important diſtinction between real and nominal Chriſtians, all of the firſt

character, of every age and of every party, are so far from being under the influence of implicit faith, that they try the truth by its fruits, and adhere to it for its effects. There is something more in the case of every good man, than barely a rational persuasion of the truth of religion in general, from the arguments adduced to support it. The truths of the gospel give him such a view of himself, and his own state, as experience shews him to be true. In the gospel he finds a remedy proposed for his guilt and misery, which, besides all the other evidences of its divine original, is exactly suited to his felt condition. Add to both these, that he immediately experiences its happy effect, not only in laying the best foundation for his peace, but in operating a thorough change in his heart and life. Thus hath every real Christian an inward and experimental proof of the truth of the gospel, not contrary, but superior to, stronger and more stable than any speculative reasoning. In this sense we are to understand the words of the apostle John, 1 John, v. 9. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." This is common to all real believers of whatever denomination, who not only are perfectly agreed in the essentials of religion, but much more agreed in every thing material, than they themselves either clearly apprehend or are willing to confess.

So far every good man must be acquitted from the charge of implicit faith; we may adopt concerning all such the words of our Saviour to Peter, Matth. xvi. 17. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,

but my Father which is in heaven." It is no leſs plain, that in every thing that is ſuppoſed to make a part of, or that hath any connection with religion, they may judge by the ſame rule. In all theſe modes of opinion in leſſer matters, in all theſe circumſtances which ſerve to diſtinguiſh one ſect from another, though they may determine in different, nay in oppoſite ways, yet they all proceed upon the ſame general rule, viz. the influence which ſuch diſputed point has, as a means, upon the ſubſtance and end of all religion. This appears from the reaſoning on each ſide, in all religious diſputes. This principle, as common to both, is often expreſsly mentioned, and always manifeſtly implies, that thoſe doctrines, or that way of expreſſing doctrines, and thoſe practices, which are in fact moſt conducive to holineſs, are, and for that very reaſon muſt be, moſt agreeable to the will of God.

But what I have chiefly in view is, to ſhow, that this appears from the very fact uſually brought to prove that the religion of almoſt all mankind is no better than implicit faith. The fact I mean is, that the bulk of mankind is greatly ſwayed in the choice of opinion by the authority and example of others. This, indeed, does not hold ſo generally as is commonly ſuppoſed. We have ſeen above, that it doth not hold, with regard to the ſubſtance of religion, in any good man; for in this he will call no man maſter on earth. But even when it does hold, it is, perhaps, not ſo blameable as many are apt to imagine. Let it be admitted, then, that in many inſtances it is the authority and example of men, more than any other reaſon, that deter-

mines the judgement. Let it be admitted, that this is the caſe with the bulk of mankind, and even in ſome meaſure with the beſt. I muſt be allowed to aſk, What is it that procures theſe perſons ſuch authority? What is it that firſt begins, eſtabliſhes, or perpetuates their influence? Nothing elſe but the real or apparent ſanctity of their character. In vain will a profligate, or one manifeſtly deſtitute of perſonal worth, ſet himſelf at the head of a party, or attempt to draw diſciples after him. It is the ſuppoſed piety and probity of the perſon, that gives weight to his example, and force to his precepts. This weighs more with the ſober ſerious part of mankind, and indeed with mankind in general, than the greateſt intellectual abilities, and otherwiſe moſt admired talents. Whoever has acquired a great reputation for piety and ſincerity, will, with little art, or rather no art at all, nay, without ſo much as intending it, bring his principles and practice into repute. At the ſame time, one of a contrary character, with all the powers of eloquence, and every other outward advantage, ſhall fail in attempting to perſuade.

Now, what is this, but that mankind proceed mainly in their judgement upon the very rule which I have endeavoured to ſhew is the beſt they could have choſen? They try principles by their effects, as a tree by its fruits. Wherever they ſee the beſt man, they conclude that he muſt be actuated by the moſt excellent as well as the moſt powerful principles. The multitude, or lower claſs of mankind, are uſually the ſcorn of half-thinkers and ſuperficial reaſoners, for this attachment to perſons.

But were a comparison faithfully made between the several motives of choice in different classes, there would be no great cause of triumph. When we consider how unfit the plurality of mankind are to judge in an intricate debate, darkened, perhaps, by the art and subtilty of those who handle it, we shall find they are little, if at all, to blame. In the one view, no doubt, they may be said to be actuated by implicit faith; but in truth, and at bottom, they are following the wisest and most salutary of all moral maxims.

A survey of the history, either of religion in general, or of the Christian religion in particular, would set this matter in the clearest light. But little of this kind can come within the limits of a single discourse. I shall not therefore stay to mention the retired manner of life, and pretended sanctity of the inventors of the heathen idolatry, though it may be applied to this subject; and would serve to shew the universal sense and general expectation of mankind. There is a saying of an eminent and violent enemy of the Christian faith, 'That gravity is of the very essence of imposture.' This is nothing else but a perverted view, and malicious representation of the general truth, that apparent sanctity is necessary to establish any sacred authority. But is there any thing more unquestionable, or that hath been more frequently observed, than that the victory of truth over error, in the first ages of Christianity, was much more owing to the shining piety of the primitive Christians in general, together with the patience and constancy of the martyrs, than to any other means. Reason

may convince the underſtanding, but example ſeizes and keeps poſſeſſion of the heart It was the eminent piety and uſefulneſs of the ſaints in former ages, which attracted ſuch veneration and love from the multitude, as ſoon proceeded to a criminal exceſs. Not content with imitating the amiable example of thoſe whom they held in ſuch eſteem, by a natural aſſociation they affixed a ſanctity to relics, and this produced a variety of ſuperſtitious practices. I cannot alſo help being of opinion, that it was the ſevere and mortified lives of many of the retired devotees in the Romiſh church, that kept that corrupt body in credit for ſome ages longer than it could have otherwiſe continued.

On the other hand, who does not know, that the moſt formidable and ſucceſsful attacks made by the reformers on that mother of abominations, were their expoſing the corrupt and diſſolute lives of her prieſts and members? This they were at no ſmall pains to do, both in a grave and in an ironical ſtrain. As the covetouſneſs and ambition of many, and the licentious debauchery of others of the clergy, firſt brought the doctrines into ſuſpicion; ſo thoſe examples, when held up to light, made a far greater number of converts, than any abſurdities in belief, how groſs and palpable ſoever. The truth is, we find all parties greedily lay hold of this weapon whenever it is preſented to them, and uſe it with great confidence againſt their adverſaries; and in ſo doing they diſcover a conviction, that principles are never ſo powerfully ſupported as by the good, nor ſo effectually diſparaged as by the bad characters of thoſe who profeſs them.

If we leave the hiſtory of former ages, and examine the ſtate of the preſent, the ſame truth will ſtill be the reſult of our inquiry, and appear with increaſing evidence. Different parties and denominations prevail in different places: and wherever any party or denomination greatly prevails, the effects may eaſily be traced up to its cauſe; and will appear, by no very diſtant tradition, to have been owing to the eminent piety of ſome one or more of that profeſſion in a former period, or, which is much the ſame, to the comparatively odious and vicious characters of thoſe who oppoſe them *.

* Our own country will afford us ſome ſenſible and ſtriking proofs of the juſtice of this obſervation. There had been a ſtruggle, from the very firſt dawn of the Reformation, between Preſbytery and Epiſcopacy in Scotland. This conteſt, however, came to its greateſt height about 100 years ago, when the Preſbyterians were ejected, and Epiſcopacy was eſtabliſhed by a tyrannical civil government, and continued by a ſevere and cruel perſecution. We had by this means a trial of both: and it is very obſervable, that the odium which juſtly fell upon Epiſcopacy from the rage and inhumanity of thoſe who had the chief direction, was the circumſtance that determined the body of the nation to endeavour its ſubverſion. Yet, wherever there happened to be a few miniſters of that perſuaſion pious in their lives, and diligent in the duties of their office, there were many perſons and families who joined with them in communion, and their poſterity adhere to that opinion even to this day. This was the caſe in ſome places of the eaſt and north country. But in the weſtern parts of Scotland, where the Epiſcopal clergy were, almoſt to a man, ignorant, ſlothful, or vicious, they were univerſally deſerted, and hardly a ſingle adherent to that perſuaſion is now to be found. I

It is no juſt objection to the account here given, that we find inſtances in which principles ſeem to give a ſanction to characters, inſtead of receiving ſupport from them. There are, no doubt, caſes in which a man's being known to embrace certain principles, will be alone ſufficient to make him odious, however blameleſs or even praiſe-worthy his conduct be in every other reſpect. At the ſame time, perhaps, the failings of another ſhall be either wholly pardoned, or greatly extenuated, if he eſpouſe, but eſpecially if he is active in vindicating, the principles which are held ſacred. But this is no more than the natural and neceſſary conſequence of any ſet of principles being once firmly eſtabliſhed. They acquire their credit at firſt, in the way I have already mentioned; but when that credit is high, it will bring a ſuſpicion upon every thing that oppoſes it, however ſpecious and promiſing in outward appearance. There is nothing ſurpriſing here, nor indeed any thing but what is perfectly natural; for, as one or a few inſtances commonly do not, ſo in reaſon they ought not to ſhake the reputation of truths, which have been eſtabliſhed by long experience of their worth and efficacy. Neither muſt it be forgotten, that when

cannot omit mentioning here what was ſaid by a lady of quality at that time to Dr Burnet, when he came to viſit the weſt country. It was to the following purpoſe: "We of the laity cannot judge upon controverſial points, but we ſee theſe men whom you perſecute, grave in their deportment, ſtrictly holy in their converſation, and very laborious in their functions, while many of your clergy are ignorant, ſlothful, and vicious." This is what determines the judgement of the people.

examples ſeem to ſtand in oppoſition one to another, and to lead to different concluſions, it is not from one or two that a judgement can be paſſed, but from many, and theſe compared and examined with great diligence and care.

I conclude the illuſtration of this head with remarking, that the principle above laid down will explain, in a clear and ſatisfying manner, two appearances in the moral world, which ſeem directly to contradict one another. By what happens ſometimes in religion, we ſhall be apt to conclude, that there is in human nature a proneneſs to change, or a love of novelty purely on its own account. Accordingly we find this laid to the charge of mankind by ſeveral authors. And it cannot be denied, that ſome men, or ſects, often introduce new practices, which acquire great reputation, and almoſt univerſal acceptance. By other examples, however, we are taught to aſcribe to human nature a ſtrong attachment to old opinions, and hatred of all innovation. What is remarkable is, that both theſe take place chiefly in little circumſtances, and things of ſmall moment; new inventions being ſometimes gone into with a zeal, and old cuſtoms adhered to with an obſtinacy, which the intrinſic value of the things contended for does not ſeem to merit on either ſide. To aſcribe this to the different diſpoſitions of individuals, will not be a ſatisfactory ſolution; for we ſee ſometimes examples of both in the ſame perſons. But, by ſearching a little deeper, we ſhall unravel this difficulty, and diſcover, that though the love of novelty, or a veneration for antiquity, may be ſometimes the immediate principle

of action, there is another ultimate principle which is the cauſe of both, and in different circumſtances produces either the one or the other. This principle is no other than that admiration of real or ſuppoſed worth, which has been illuſtrated above. Whoever hath acquired a great reputation for piety and holineſs, may eaſily introduce any indifferent practice, though not common before, eſpecially if it be conſidered as an evidence or expreſſion of his piety. On this ſuppoſition, his differing from, or doing more than others, will be taken notice of to his praiſe *. But he may much more eaſily introduce a new than depart from an old cuſtom. The reaſon is plain; for ancient cuſtoms having been eſtabliſhed on the ground already aſſigned, men are uſually very tenacious of them; and it requires no ſmall degree of credit and character either to change or to aboliſh them.

We now proceed to make ſome practical improvement of what has been ſaid.

In the *firſt* place, From what has been ſaid upon this ſubject, we may derive one of the plaineſt and moſt ſatisfying proofs of the truth of the goſpel: A proof level to the meaneſt capacity, and there-

* There is great reaſon to think that it was in this very way that many different rites were brought into the Chriſtian church, which in a long courſe of time grew into a maſs of abominable ſuperſtition. They were at firſt, perhaps, but the modes or circumſtances of the worſhip, or practice of pious perſons, but from being voluntary and purely circumſtantial, they came by degrees to be conſidered as parts of religious worſhip; and therefore ſinful in the performers, but much more ſinful in the propoſers.

fore proper to preſerve ordinary Chriſtians from being ſhaken by the bold and inſolent attacks now made on religion by ſome of the loweſt rank: A proof, at the ſame time, not only deſerving the attention of the moſt intelligent, but which of all others is certainly the moſt deciſive. Let us try it by its fruits. Let us compare the temper and character of real Chriſtians, with thoſe of infidels, and ſee which of them beſt merits the approbation of an honeſt and impartial judge. Let us take in every circumſtance that will contribute to make the compariſon juſt and fair, and ſee what will be the reſult. I ſay this, becauſe I can by no means allow, that great multitudes, though born in a country where Chriſtianity is profeſſed, ought to be conſidered as Chriſtians, when they are open and violent enemies to the goſpel in all its parts. They ought rather to be thrown into the ſcale of infidelity. But, ſince moſt of them have formed no fixed principles at all, becauſe they have never thought upon the ſubject, we ſhall leave them entirely out of the queſtion.

Is, then, the character and practice of infidels in general, once to be compared with that of ſuch Chriſtians as believe upon perſonal conviction? However much the natural ſenſe of right and wrong may be obſcured and perverted in ſome, I ſhould think there are few who will not manifeſtly perceive to whom the preference is due. In which of the two do you find the moſt regular and fervent piety towards God? Here, perhaps, it will be ſaid, This is what no man expects to find in unbelievers, it is no part of their plan, and therefore

ought not to be included in the compariſon. But as the general ſenſe of mankind does not require it, ſo I can never ſuffer that our duty to God ſhould be eraſed out of the moral law. Beſides, the general pretence now, is not atheiſm, but theiſm. The queſtion is therefore altogether pertinent; and perſons of this character are ſelf-condemned, who, by their total neglect of all religious worſhip, are as much chargeable with impiety as infidelity. In which of the two is to be found the greateſt integrity and uprightneſs in their conduct between man and man, the moſt unfeigned good-will, and moſt active beneficence to others? Is it the unbeliever, or the Chriſtian, who clothes the naked, and deals his bread to the hungry? Aſk the many and noble ancient ſtructures raiſed for the relief of the diſeaſed and the poor, to whom they owe their eſtabliſhment and ſupport? Which of theſe two claſſes of men are moſt remarkable for ſelf-government? How often is the unexperienced youth initiated in debauchery of all kinds, by theſe very friends of mankind, who charitably declaim againſt prieſtcraft and deluſion, and happily eradicate the prejudices of education, by treating religion and all religious perſons with deriſion and ſcorn! With what fatal ſucceſs has the infidel often ſeduced the unwary virgin into the deſtructive paths of luſt, by firſt looſening the obligation of religion, and then juſtifying the indulgence of every natural deſire? We ſhall carry the compariſon no farther in this place; but I muſt beg of every one who has had the happineſs to be acquainted with an eminently pious, humble, active, uſeful Chriſtian, to ſay,

whether he can admit it as poſſible, under the adminiſtration of a wiſe and good God, that ſuch a perſon is governed by a fable invented by deſigning villains, while the infidel alone is in poſſeſſion of the truth, which is pure in its nature, and muſt be proved by its fruits *.

In the *second* place, Since not only religion in general, but every particular doctrine of religion, ought to be tried by its fruits, let neither miniſters nor people ever loſe view of this great rule in the doctrines which they teach on the one hand, or embrace on the other. Let us alſo particularly remember, that no credit is to be given to any

* I am ſenſible it is often pretended, that ſeveral infidels have been men of unblemiſhed morals. Collins was a good man, ſay ſome, and Shafteſbury was yet a better man. Perhaps, theſe individuals might not be chargeable with the moſt open diſſolution, and groſſeſt ſenſuality, which would have been inconſiſtent with their giving themſelves to cloſe ſtudy and application. Beſides, they who aſſaulted, with ſo much boldneſs, eſtabliſhed opinions, muſt have been under a conſiderable reſtraint, from a regard to their character and cauſe. This ought not to be rejected as an improbable ſuppoſition, or uncharitable allegation againſt them, who ſo liberally reproach others, with inſincere, hypocritical, and ſaint-like pretences. But after all, making even the largeſt allowances, there is one piece of conduct, of which both the above-named perſons were habitually guilty, which it is impoſſible for me to reconcile with good morals, even upon the laxeſt principles that have ever yet been avowed. What I mean was, their ſolemnly receiving the holy ſacrament, to qualify themſelves for bearing office in their country, though they believed it to be altogether impoſture and deceit. This was ſuch a piece of groſs and aggravated diſſimulation, as it is impoſſible either to defend in itſelf, or to ſuppoſe conſiſtent with integrity upon the whole.

high profeſſions or bold pretences, but as they are confirmed by the fact. I obſerve here, with much pleaſure, what advantage the fundamental ſcripture-doctrines, which have been long the glory and happineſs of this church, will derive from a fair and full inquiry into their influence and effects. The doctrines I mean are, the loſt ſtate of man by nature; ſalvation by the free grace of God; juſtification by the imputed righteouſneſs of Chriſt; and ſanctification by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit. Theſe were the doctrines of the Reformation, when their excellence was put beyond all doubt or queſtion, by their powerful and valuable effects. Many adverſaries, indeed, ſoon roſe up to contradict or corrupt them; and it is much to be lamented that they are, at preſent, by many, ſo boldly and ſo violently oppoſed in this once happy iſland. But we may venture to affirm, that when the doctrine of the croſs retained its purity and ſimplicity, then was true religion, including every moral virtue, ſeen to grow from it as its fruit. On the other hand, when and wherever it has been run down, and a pretended moral doctrine has been introduced, to the prejudice and ſubverſion of the grace of God, it hath been always followed by a deluge of profaneneſs and immorality in practice. It is eaſy and common to diſguiſe the truth by miſrepreſentation, or to vilify it by opprobrious titles. It is eaſy to pretend a warm zeal for the great doctrines of morality, and frequently to repeat, in a pulpit, the neceſſity of holineſs in general; but all impartial perſons ought, and the world in general will, judge more by works than by words. Let

us ſuppoſe, for example, the old objection revived againſt a miniſter who preaches the doctrine of grace, that it looſens the obligations to holineſs of life. The objection is, of all others, the moſt ſpecious: yet, if that miniſter diſcharges his duty with zeal and diligence, watches over his people's ſouls, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all long-ſuffering and doctrine; is ſtrict and holy in his own converſation, abhorring and flying from the ſociety of the ungodly; and if the effects of his miniſtry be to turn many ſinners from the error of their ways, and to make an intelligent, ſerious, regular people; the accuſation will not be received: and who will ſay that it ought? On the other hand, is any miniſter more covetous of the fleece, than diligent for the welfare of the flock; cold and heartleſs in his ſacred work, but loud and noiſy in promiſcuous and fooliſh converſation; careleſs or partial in the exerciſe of diſcipline; covering or palliating the ſins of the great, becauſe they may promote him; making friends and companions of profane perſons; though this man's zeal ſhould burn like a flame againſt Antinomianiſm, and though his own unvaried ſtrain ſhould be the neceſſity of holineſs, I would never take him to be any of its real friends.

Let us not, my brethren, deceive ourſelves, or attempt to deceive others, by plauſible pretences. Let us all be zealous for good works; not the name, but the thing. Let us not expect to promote them by a little cold reaſoning, or affected flowery declamation; but by the ſimplicity of the goſpel, by the doctrine of the croſs, which will not only tell men that they ought to be holy, but effectually

bring them to that happy ſtate. The leading principle of true holineſs, according to the goſpel, is a deep and grateful ſenſe of redeeming love. 2 Cor. v. 14. "For the love of Chriſt conſtraineth us, becauſe we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, ſhould not henceforth live unto themſelves, but unto him which died for them, and roſe again."

In the *third* place, From what has been ſaid on this ſubject, you may ſee, in a very ſtrong light, how neceſſary it is that miniſters ſhould be, not only really, but viſibly and eminently holy; and with how much care they are bound to avoid every appearance of evil. There are ſome miniſters who ſtrongly plead for liberty and freedom, and loudly complain of the malice, uncharitableneſs, and cenſoriouſneſs of the world. They ſeem as if they deſired, nay, which is ſtill more fooliſh, expected, that no part of their conduct ſhould be attended to, or any inference drawn from it with reſpect to their character. This will never be the caſe till they are inviſible. It appears, from what hath been ſaid in the preceding diſcourſe, that it is the right and the duty of every man to try a miniſter by his fruits. Ignorance, indeed, may ſometimes be guilty of miſtakes to our prejudice, and malice or envy may go too far; yet this is only what we ought to lay our account with; and it ſhould excite us, not to a contempt of the judgement of others, but to greater ſtrictneſs and circumſpection, that "they may be aſhamed who falſely accuſe our good converſation in Chriſt."

It is very hurtful in this as in many other cafes, when a man views things only on one fide. Some are apt to impute fo much to the malice and uncharitablenefs of the world, that they feldom or never think themfelves truly guilty of any offence or miſcarriage. I am perfuaded many are in a manner blinded to the errors of their own conduct by this very circumftance. Or, if they cannot but be fenfible that they have been guilty of fomething that was wrong, when the fault is aggravated by report, they feem to think that this atones for any thing really blame-worthy, and fo are hardened both againſt confeffion and repentance. To fpeak without prejudice, it is more than probable, that we are as much chargeable with unguarded and offenfive conduct on the one hand, as the world with precipitate or partial judgement on the other. It hath been fometimes obferved, that the multitude of common people are but poor judges of a man's ability or learning, but they are very good judges of his life. There is a great deal of truth in this obfervation; and to fupport it I add, that even a hypocritical pretence is extremely hard to maintain, and fo often betrays itfelf by little circumftances, that there are very few whofe real character is not better underftood by the world than by themfelves. The chief exception I know to this is the cafe of violent party-difputes. The injuftice done to characters on each fide there, is very great. If you take a man's character from one to whom he ftands in party-oppofition, you muft conceive him not a man, but a monfter. But, (fetting this afide, which does not fall within the compafs of our prefent fub-

ject), in general, it is surely much more becoming, and it is infinitely more safe, for us to suspect ourselves, than to complain of hard measure from the world. Let us, therefore, by doubling our diligence in every personal and ministerial duty, endeavour to "make our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven," Matth. v. 16.

In the *fourth* place, I must now take the liberty, in fidelity to the trust committed to me, to be a little more particular in the application of this subject, and to inquire, whether ministers are not, in good measure, chargeable with the low state to which religion is at present reduced. May I not say without offence, that an eminently holy, diligent, and successful gospel-ministry, was once the glory and blessing of this part of the united kingdom? But how are we since fallen asleep! "How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!" That there is a difference is plain; and that this difference does not lie in inferior abilities or a less proportion of learning, is equally certain. I am sensible, that this is a part of my subject which would require to be touched with a very tender and delicate hand, and that, perhaps, I run as great a hazard to inflame and exasperate the sore, as to bring any effectual cure. This is, indeed, itself, one strong symptom of our disease, that we cannot endure plain dealing; and there is not a single circumstance in which there is a greater difference between this and the preceding age. What in former times would have been reckoned (to speak in their language) no more than plainness

and miniſterial freedom, would now be called the moſt ſlanderous invective and unpardonable abuſe. Inſtead, therefore, of taking upon me to ſay who are chiefly to be blamed as the criminal cauſes of it, I ſhall only affirm, and lament the melancholy effect, that we have in many places of this church, a deſpiſed, forſaken, uſeleſs miniſtry; that many of the people have gone from mountain to mountain, and forgotten their reſting-place, while a ſtill greater number is faſt aſleep in ignorance, ſecurity, and ſloth. Where is that union, that mutual eſteem and affection, which once ſubſiſted between miniſters and their people? It muſt be acknowledged, that their influence and authority is now in a great meaſure loſt; and therefore I may ſafely conclude that their uſefulneſs is gone. That the fault is all on one ſide, is neither a modeſt nor a probable ſuppoſition. Should we throw the blame off ourſelves, what a terrible load muſt we thereby lay upon others! we muſt ſuppoſe and ſay, that under a blameleſs miniſtry, under the beſt and pureſt of inſtruction, one part of the nation is ſunk in brutality and ſloth, and the other rent in pieces by diviſion, and religion loſt in the fury of contending parties.

We may ſay ſo, my brethren, and ſome do ſay what amounts to the ſame thing; but it is not credible. I do, therefore, in the moſt earneſt manner, beſeech every miniſter in this audience, ſeriouſly to think, how far he hath given juſt cauſe to his people to deſpiſe his perſon, or deſert his miniſtrations. Let us not ſo inſiſt upon the ignorance, prejudices,

and weakneſs of the giddy multitude, as if a failure on our part was impoſſible. We may be ſometimes blamed in the wrong place; but we have, perhaps, as much reſpect in general as we really deſerve. Do not think it is ſufficient that you are free from groſs crimes, ſuch as blaſphemy, riot, and unclean luſt. Bleſſed be God, nothing of this kind would yet be ſuffered among us without cenſure. But there are many things, which, either ſeparately or together, render a miniſter juſtly contemptible, on which no law, either civil or eccleſiaſtic, can lay hold. If one ſet apart to the ſervice of Chriſt in the goſpel, manifeſtly ſhews his duty to be a burden, and does no more work than is barely ſufficient to ſcreen him from cenſure; if he reckons it a piece of improvement, how ſeldom or how ſhort he can preach, and makes his boaſt how many omiſſions he has brought a patient and an injured people to endure without complaint; while, at the ſame time, he cannot ſpeak with temper of thoſe who are willing to do more than himſelf; however impoſſible it may be to aſcertain his faults by a libel, he juſtly merits the deteſtation of every faithful miniſter, and every real Chriſtian.

The things here in view, though they are eaſily ſeen, are difficult to deſcribe; and therefore I ſhall not attempt to be more particular. But I cannot forbear warning you againſt, and pointing out the evil of two pieces of diſhoneſty, which may poſſibly be found united to gravity and decency in other reſpects. One of them is common in our

neighbour kingdom, and may poſſibly have taken place among us, though I cannot aſſirm it. The other, I am certain, hath many times taken place in the church of Scotland. The firſt is a miniſter's ſubſcribing articles of doctrine, which he does not believe. This is ſo direct a violation of ſincerity, that it is aſtoniſhing to think, how men can ſet their minds at eaſe in the proſpect, or keep them in peace after the deliberate commiſſion of it. The very excuſes and evaſions that are offered in defence of it, are a diſgrace to reaſon, as well as a ſcandal to religion. What ſucceſs can be expected from that man's miniſtry, who begins it with an act of ſuch complicated guilt? How can he take upon him to reprove others for ſin, or to train them up in virtue and true goodneſs, while himſelf is chargeable with direct, premeditated, and perpetual perjury? I know nothing ſo nearly reſembling it, as thoſe caſes in trade, in which men make falſe entries, and at once ſcreen and aggravate their fraud, by ſwearing, or cauſing others to ſwear, contrary to truth. This is juſtly reputed ſcandalous even in the world, and yet I know no circumſtance in which they differ, that does not tend to ſhew it to be leſs criminal than the other. We are not yet ſo much hardened in this ſin as many in our neighbour church; for I have never found any among us ſo bold as to profeſs and defend it. But, if no ſuch thing is at all admitted among us, why is there ſuch a ſuſpicion of it? why do ſo many complain, that the great and operative doctrines of the goſpel are withdrawn, and an unſubſtantial

theory of virtue ſubſtituted in their place? or why are ſuch complaints put to ſilence, ſince it may be ſo eaſily done? Appearances are certainly ſuch as will warrant me in mentioning it upon this occaſion: and I have particularly choſen to introduce it upon this ſubject, that I may attack it, not as an error, but as a fraud; not as a miſtake in judgement, but an inſtance of groſs diſhoneſty and inſincerity of heart. Suppoſing, therefore, that there may poſſibly be truth in the charge againſt ſome of us, I muſt beg every miniſter, but eſpecially thoſe young perſons who have an eye to that ſacred office, to remember, that God will not be mocked, though the world may be deceived. In his ſight, no gravity of deportment, no pretence to freedom of inquiry, a thing excellent in itſelf, no regular exerciſe of the right of private judgement, will warrant or excuſe ſuch a lie for gain, as ſolemnly to ſubſcribe what they do not believe.

The other particular I propoſed to mention, is the ſolemn atteſtation of men's characters, not only in general, but in particular qualities, without any ſatisfying knowledge whether the thing affirmed is true or falſe. This hath been often done in the church of Scotland, not by particular perſons, with whom we might renounce relation, but by conſent of many, gravely and deliberately, in conſtituted courts. Can we avoid making the following obvious, but melancholy reflection? How great is the blindneſs of men to thoſe ſins, which are introduced by degrees, and countenanced by prevailing paſſion! Should we be told by an hiſtorian of cre-

dit, that in one of the dark and corrupt ages of Popery, it was common for a body of miniſters, when deſired, to give a ſigned atteſtation to particular perſons, that they were ſtrict obſervers of the Sabbath, and worſhipped God regularly in their families, while the perſons atteſting knew nothing of the matter, and, in fact, with regard to ſome of them it was abſolutely falſe: Would there be a diſſenting voice in affirming, that ſuch men muſt have been loſt to all ſenſe of integrity, and utterly unworthy of regard? What ſhall we ſay, if the ſame thing is done among us every day, and defended by no better argument than the judgement of charity, which believeth all things? Charity teaches us to believe no ill of another without ſatisfying evidence, and forbids us to ſpread it although it be true, without apparent neceſſity. But will charity either juſtify or excuſe us, in ſolemnly affirming a poſitive fact, the exiſtence of which is uncertain in itſelf, and to us unknown? I do not take upon me to ſay that all are bad men who are guilty, by act or conſent, of this practice, becauſe I do not know how far the plea of ignorance or miſtake may go; but this may be ſafely ſaid, that they do in a public capacity, what if they were to do in a private capacity, between man and man, would render them contemptible, or infamous, or both.

Theſe two particulars have often brought reproach upon the church of Scotland, to which it is very difficult to make a proper reply. Would to God the occaſion given for it were wholly taken away! In the mean time, every one who has a juſt

regard to the glory of God, or the ſucceſs of his own work, will endeavour to maintain ſuch an uniformity of character, as will bear that examination, to which it ought in juſtice, and muſt of neneſſity be expoſed.

In the *last* place, I muſt beg leave to ſpeak a few words to the people in general, on the ſubject of this diſcourſe. You may learn, my brethren, from the preceding diſcourſe, by what rule you ought to judge, in all religious controverſies, where a determination is neceſſary. Try all principles by their effects, and every perſon's pretences by his conduct. Examine, as far as you have proper evidence, who have real and vital religion moſt at heart, and what means do effectually promote it. Believe not every profeſſion, but ſee which is moſt conſiſtent in all its parts. Have patience, in difficult caſes, till the tree have time to bring its fruits to maturity. Time will often write a clear and legible character, on what was very dark and dubious at firſt.

It is probable that ſome will be ready to ſay, 'There is no ſmall doubtfulneſs in this rule itſelf. There may be found good men of many different parties, how then ſhall we judge between them?' I anſwer, Wherever there is true religion, theſe perſons are to be conſidered as the ſervants of God, and his grace in them is to be confeſſed without reluctance, and adored with thankfulneſs. There will, nevertheleſs, be ſtill ſufficient means to diſtinguiſh between one profeſſion and another, which hath the greateſt influence in making men truly good. There may be, here and there, a good man under

very great disadvantages. This may serve to keep us from a bigotted narrowness of mind, and uncharitable condemnation of others. But it will never occasion, in any prudent person, a departure from those principles, and that dispensation of ordinances, which he sees to be best for building him up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation. The truth is, one great design of this discourse was to teach men to distinguish between the upright and the worthless of all sects. Turn your zeal from parties to persons. Do not reproach or oppose men merely because they are of this or the other persuasion. But wherever there is a wicked or a worldly man in the office of a minister, avoid the wolf in sheep's clothing, for your own sake, and, if possible, drag off his disguise, that others may not be his prey. What doth it signify what party a man is of, if the foundations are destroyed, and truth and holiness, these inseparable companions, are trampled under foot? When shall the time come, when the sincere lovers of Christ, of every denomination, shall join together in opposition to his open enemies and treacherous friends? There is a wonderful, though a natural union, among all worldly men, against the spirit and power of true religion wherever it appears. I am sorry to add, that this is one of the instances in which the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. Many will not meet together on earth for the worship of God, who shall have but one temple at last, where all from the east and from the west, from the north and from

the ſouth, ſhall meet, and join in their Creator's and Redeemer's praiſe. The terms of admiſſion into, and of excluſion from this happy dwelling, are recorded in the following remarkable terms, with which I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe, as indeed they are the ſum of all that has been ſaid in it: Rev. xxi. 27. "And there ſhall in no wiſe enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatſoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

END OF VOLUME IV.

J. PILLANS & SONS,
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